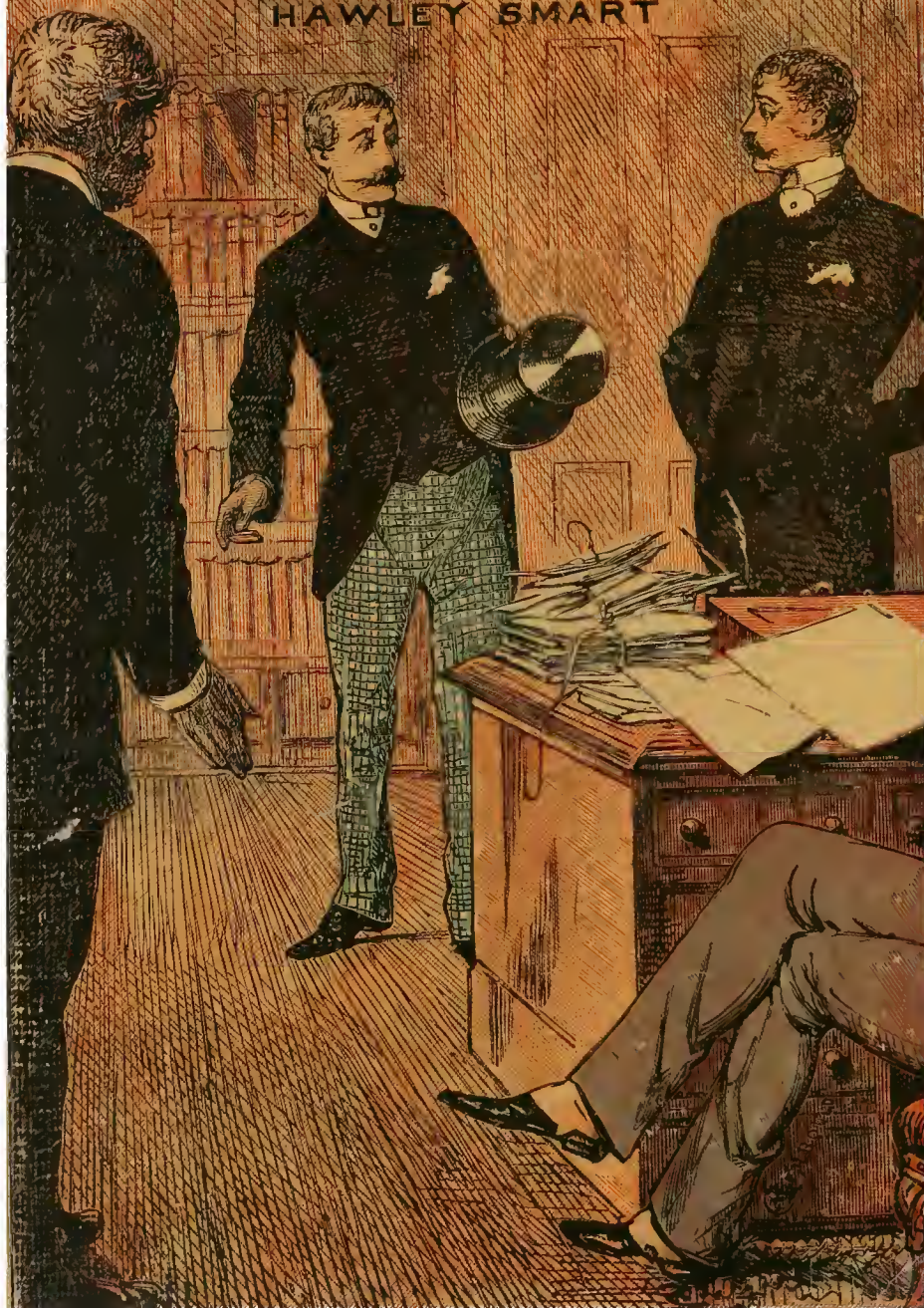




# SOCIAL SINNERS

BY  
HAWLEY SMART



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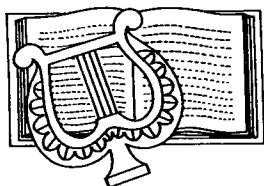
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*SOCIAL SINNERS.*

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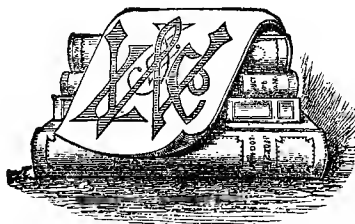
# SOCIAL SINNERS.

A Novel.

BY

HAWLEY SMART,

AUTHOR OF "BREEZIE LANG," "BOUND TO WIN," "SUNSHINE  
AND SNOW," ETC.



London:

WARD, LOCK AND CO., WARWICK HOUSE,  
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# SOCIAL SINNERS.



## CHAPTER I.

### THE THEATINE SMOKING-ROOM.

**T**HE London season draws to a close, the dog days are in full blast, and July is of the old-fashioned pattern. People are waxing querulous at the heat, and pronounce the opera a Turkish bath set to music. It is delicious to sit in the park if you can only muster courage to get there, and are fortunate enough to catch a *causeur* who will murmur the last scandal into your ears, and be content with simple grunts of assent. The genuine sybarite avails himself of humanity's weakness for listening to the sound of its own babble, and permits the gossip of the day to be trickled into his ears without exerting himself to comment upon it. There is much to be said in July about society's doings: there are those that are reputed ruined, there are the successes, the disappointments, the marriages, the ruptures of the marital tie. Society has usually plenty to say at this time, and, it must be confessed, is by no means reticent about saying it with more or less acidity. What heart-burnings, what jealousies, hatreds, friendships, and surprises, blossom forth in these fourteen or fifteen weeks



that lie between Easter and Goodwood! Unknown painters, unknown dramatists, unknown authors have found themselves *known* before the Scotch, Cowes, and Continental emigration sets in, whilst the gods of the last season have discovered they are forgotten. It is the same with beauty, and the approved daughters of Venus are appalled at the discovery of a country comet, pronounced by the great authorities to eclipse them all, great authorities like the critical bench on other no better understood subjects, an obscure shadowy *vehmgerichte*, against whose judgment there is no appeal, quite as likely to pronounce red hair and blue eyes with a slight cast in them a thing to rave about as Aphrodite direct from the foam. You see there is fashion in all these things, from fashionable beauties to fashionable jockeys, from fashionable plungers to fashionable milliners, from fashionable religion to fashionable vice, alas! *Dum vivimus vivamus*, but strictly *à la mode* in these days; whether our path lie towards the zenith or nadir of our career, whether it is glory or ruin stares us in the face, let it be done conventionally. Success ought not to elate you, nor the contemplation of what seems necessitous suicide induce you to bore your fellow-creatures. Go! but do not weary us for weeks beforehand. Society has attained well-nigh the stoicism of the ancients, and loses its most petted darlings with a sad shake of the head. If these lost pleiads are of the masculine sex, the women speak of them as "poor things," the men as "poor beggars"; when they are of the feminine, the men speak of them as "poor things," and the women—well, it is to be hoped—don't speak of them at all.

Soft shine the lights in the smoking-room of the Theatine, and as the clock verges on the stroke of midnight, that pleasant symposium begins to fill up, not that it is ever very empty. There are a veteran band of late diners, who, despising alike the attractions of the opera, the theatre, or society, adjourn there straight from the coffee-room, who believe much in the tranquil enjoyment of tobacco and *moistened* conversation, till such time as inclination should suggest bed, a very sluggard in suggestion, that same inclination, as concerned some half-dozen of them, who smoked, talked, and sipped their grog with

as much solid, steady enjoyment as the renowned toppers of the Johnsonian era.

"Old George Latimer buried to-day," observed one of these worthies, as he superintended the brewing of a fresh beaker of his particular vanity.

"Yes; he's had a real good innings too; been a man about town these five-and-forty years, and at all in the ring. They'll miss him in the shires as much as they will at Newmarket, miss him in society as much as at "the Turf." He'd a rattling good fortune to start with. Do you suppose he left anything behind him?"

"Hum, not so much, perhaps, as he began with. If he made a *coup* or two, yet he got it pretty hard across the knuckles many times in his racing life. Still he was no fool, and could not have hurt himself at whist, at all events. I should think there were few better players in London. Still, whatever a man who led George Latimer's life began with, it's a monstrous difficult thing to guess what may be left of it at the end of forty-five years."

"That's so," replied the other, sententiously. "I wonder whether they read his will to-day, and where what he has to leave is left. He'd no very near relative, had he?"

"Two or three nephews or nieces, I fancy, but I can't speak for certain; I dare say we shall hear before long. Ah, here comes Lithfield, he knew Latimer well, and I dare say can tell us something about it."

The new comer nodded slightly to the pair of gossips, and was about to go further up the room, when the first speaker, old Colonel Gobmouth, hailed him and said: "Sit down here for a moment, Viscount, I want to ask you a question or two."

Thus appealed to, Viscount Lithfield turned with his usual bored, weary look, dropped into an adjoining chair, and as he lit a fresh cigarette, said in rather *trainante* tones: "Upon what can I throw the light of my intelligence for Colonel Gobmouth?"

"Were you at George Latimer's funeral to-day?"

"Of course; he has been one of my greatest friends since I was first launched on town about twenty-five years ago."

"Went off well, eh? Satisfactory funeral, that is."

Lithfield made no immediate response, but looked his interlocutor quietly over for about a minute, then, rising leisurely, observed, "You will see all about it in tomorrow's papers," and lounged away.

Gobmouth felt conscious of having been most scientifically snubbed, and the broad grin on his friend Bubbleton's face was by no means soothing to his outraged feelings.

"Conceited beast," he muttered, "I don't believe a man in the best of society like George Latimer ever noticed Lithfield. It was a piece of ostentatious impertinence his presuming to attend Latimer's funeral at all."

We do say these little things about one another in society when our acquaintance displease us.

In the meanwhile Lithfield had made his way to his original point at the top of the room, where two of his great cronies were ensconced, Ralph Leslie and Frank Blanford, and with a nod, took his place beside them. They constituted a curious trio. Tall, swart, black-browed, grim-visaged Leslie, who from his early days till now, when he reckoned over forty summers, had lived on the frontiers of India, occasionally changing from one irregular cavalry regiment to another, a service in which men's swords were rarely long in the scabbard, and wherein there was slight risk of the horses' legs filling for lack of work, a tried brave on the war-path, a child in the ways of London life, now home on a two years' furlough. The bright, vivacious young fellow to whom he was talking when Lithfield joined them, was a nephew of Ralph's in the Rifle Brigade, full of fun, spirits, and *bonhomie*, knowing incomparably more of the ways of men and more especially women in the civilised world than his black-browed uncle, who had numbered near double his years. The wild, stirring scenes of campaigning and big game shooting, do not initiate one into the wiles and wickedness of cities, and Ralph Leslie's visits home had been few in all that five-and-twenty years. The Viscount offered a singular contrast to the above pair, a *blasé*, languid, good-looking man, about forty, who had shot in Scotland, hunted in the shires, lost his money at Ascot, Newmarket, &c., played whist at the Turf, and flirted promiscuously through

season after season since he had left college. He had never done himself much harm at any of these diversions. He had never lost money nor heart to an extent that had caused him more than temporary inconvenience, but he suffered nevertheless from satiety. Life was too easy for him, and he found it difficult to be very much in earnest about anything. He played an excellent rubber, being possessed of an excellent digestion, excellent memory, and admirable capacity for carrying wine. He shot well because he had an accurate eye and was too indifferent to the result ever to get in the least degree nervous concerning it; that same indifference gave him more success with women than the courtly devotion of other men. Explain it let those who list, but it is an undoubted fact that indifference to her attractions seldom fails to pique a pretty woman and thus interest her, very likely angrily, in the delinquent. It is always a point in a man's favour when a woman takes to thinking about him at all. The fair sex, like Balaam, often reverse the malediction they originally intended to pronounce.

"Of course you have been at Latimer's funeral," observed Leslie. "I suppose you heard nothing as to how he has left his property?"

"Curious to say I did. Such things are not usually known till a few days later; but we were given to understand this morning that Latimer has left all he has to Fred Riversley. Do you recollect him, Ralph?"

"Was not that the fellow in the Guards who went such 'a perisher' about seven years ago?" interrupted young Blanford. "He was just before my time, but I have heard many a story concerning him and his doings in those days."

"That is the man," rejoined Lithfield, "and a nicer young one I never recollect coming to infinite grief. A frank, free, cheery, light-hearted boy as ever began life; but he took to play, and every description of devilment after a bit, and ran through every stiver he had in the latter part of his career. I never could make it out, but he seemed utterly reckless towards the finish, and when we tried to expostulate with him, answered with a weary smile, 'Bah, what does it matter!' He must, I can't

help thinking, have come to some woe that none of us kenned; meanwhile, I am told that no one has the least idea of his whereabouts, or even if he is alive, and that poor George Latimer, having some doubts upon that latter point, has made his bequest conditional upon Riversley claiming his heritage within a stipulated time."

"And if he does not?" inquired Leslie.

"Then it passes positively to other hands. I can tell you no more as yet, and should, doubtless, not have been able to give you so much information were I not one of the trustees. The day after to-morrow we are to hear the will read, and shall doubtless then know all about it. Ha, Chesterton, how are you? sit down here. I was just telling 'em George Latimer's left all his money to young Fred Riversley. You knew him?"

"Knew him! we were in the same battalion, and a better fellow never lived. Poor old boy, I recollect the cause of his woe. He always was fond of racing, and as long as he bet in tenners with an occasional pony, had a lot of fun at very little expense; but in an evil hour he landed a big stake. It was the Hermit's year, you know, and he, a great follower of the 'All Rose,' had thirty hundreds about the colt. You remember, there was no hedging, they all had to stand their money, and poor Fred won three thousand in consequence. From that time his betting operations were conducted on a very different scale, and the end came speedily. But had Latimer anything to leave?"

"Something, of course, but I've no idea of what amount," said Lithfield.

"Hum," said Chesterton, meditatively; "I shouldn't wonder if it required a tolerably round sum of money to enable Fred Riversley to set foot, with safety, in this country."

"Quite likely," replied Lithfield; "however, the first thing is to find out where he is—he hasn't been heard of, I'm told, for years."

"Pouf," returned Chesterton, discharging a volume of smoke from beneath his heavy moustache, "men are mighty quick of hearing that money has been left them, and lynx-eyed to boot. You only advertise for Fred



Riversley anything like freely, and my life on it he turns up before many weeks are over."

"By the way, Chesterton, do you recollect, towards the finish of poor Fred's career, that it seemed as if the heart was all out of him, as if he was utterly indifferent to what became of him?"

"Yes; but I have seen that phase often in men driving headlong to ruin. When the horses are clean out of their hand, and they know the overturning of the coach is inevitable, it is wonderful how utterly reckless they become."

"I know all that, but it struck me, as well as some other of his friends, that he'd a trouble behind of some sort, to which his pecuniary ruin was child's play. All a mistake on our part, very likely—no skeleton in the background ever transpired, at all events.

"Quite right, not at all an uncommon thing. A break-up often brings to light the vulture whose feeding upon the entrails has produced the catastrophe. A female specimen, usually with a taste for diamonds and a *bijou* residence; but there was nothing of that sort connected with Fred Riversley's smash."

"No; but I still fancy there was trouble of some sort, of which we never heard," retorted Lithfield.

"The Lord be praised for that same," remarked Chesterton, quietly; "there was quite enough trouble of which we did; for the matter of that, there usually is."

"You think there was a woman in the background, eh, Viscount?" exclaimed young Blanford.

"No, I don't go so far as that," rejoined Lithfield; "I only say there seemed a something more than his pecuniary embarrassments to make Fred Riversley so utterly hopeless and indifferent as he was at the finish."

"I remember, years ago, poor Charley Forester, the gayest and brightest young one we had in the Guides," said Leslie, musingly, "being struck just that way. He went away on long leave to Simla, and when he came back he was as serious as an undertaker. He went through his work mechanically, but all the 'go' seemed out of him, although he volunteered for every bit of dirty service that turned up. I, and several of his intimates, did our best

to get at what was the matter. Had he played at Simla? Yes, he had, and lost not only all his ready money, but he had forged a very pretty collar for himself in the shape of bills given to the native money-lenders up there. But it was not that; there was something behind we couldn't get at. We knew a few months later, when poor Charlie fell mortally wounded in hot pursuit of a band of marauders, who had come down cattle lifting from the Afghan hills. He died with a sunny blood-dabbled ringlet in his fingers, and we heard, a little later, that he had fallen a victim, while at Simla, to the most notorious coquette in all the North-west provinces."

"Well," said Chesterton, "I can only say that if Riversley was hit in that way, knocking about for seven years, on what must have been a very limited and probably precarious income, is about as likely to drill the sentiment out of him as anything I know."

"Yes," said Lithfield, meditatively; "struggling for existence in petty continental towns must be unfavourable to the nurturing of a *grande passion*."

"Depend upon it," observed Chesterton, "when Fred Riversley turns up he won't be anxious to look back upon the past. He will be all for a fresh start, and letting what was be buried."

"I fancy you're about right," replied Lithfield; "meanwhile it's about time to go home, so far as I'm concerned. Leslie and Blanford, I've no doubt, are good for two or three more cigars."

Leslie rose, and repudiated further tobacco with a grim smile, while the rifleman muttered something about just looking in for a quarter of an hour at Pratt's, and so the little *coterie* broke up.





## CHAPTER II.

PROSSITER, CHUDKINS, AND SONS.

**I**T is impossible to conceive a more respectable firm than Messrs. Prossiter, Chudkins, and Sons, family solicitors, Lincoln's Inn Fields. Their stupendous respectability was quite oppressive. When you were shown in amongst all the japanned boxes, with their proprietors' names affixed outside, you felt you were surrounded by property—landed property—you instinctively felt that all their clients were men of substance, continually wanting to borrow a trifle of twenty or thirty thousand pounds on mortgage, to enable them to add another couple of farms to the family estate, or, on the other hand, seeking to place some such accumulations out on a similar investment. The clients of Prossiter, Chudkins, and Sons, in fact, formed a sort of ring for the accumulation of land, over which Prossiter and Chudkins presided, bringing those who had money to lend in connection with those who wanted to borrow it for the purpose of acquiring land. I need scarcely say there was quite a conservative air about the whole establishment. As you sat in the little waiting-room, enjoying the supplement of the *Times* till such time as either Prossiter or Chudkins should be able to see you, it was impossible not to picture cellars in the basement stocked with rare old port; and when, the humour of the supplement being somewhat exhausted, time waxed tedious, one was wont to picture

Prossiter taking a second glass of old port with his biscuit, and drinking it with an unctuous deliberation most aggravating to think upon. I don't know how it was, or why, but I always had an idea that Prossiter, Chudkins, and Sons kept biscuits and an open bottle of old port to support them at mid-day, or on other trying occasions.

It is needless to say, on the subject of marriage settlements, Prossiter and Chudkins were immense. You might hurry milliners and upholsterers, hustle bridesmaids, and bustle up the families generally, but you need not hope to make Prossiter and Chudkins change the even tenor of their way. They goaded impatient bridegrooms to madness by the deliberation of their proceedings, usually, as things at last approached a conclusion, raising some singular legal question, such as whether it was in the power, having due reference to the grandmother's will, of the bridegroom to settle that £5,000 at all ; whether it was not still in trust for some reason not explained, and, in fact, whether the point had not better be referred to counsel before they went any further. Then traducers declared that half the settlements they drew up were open to be disputed in a court of law, but that the heavy cloak of respectability in which they were shrouded usually shielded them from the consequences of their legal ignorance ; while people about to marry found the only thing was to do it, and sign the settlements some months after the ceremony. There was a lazy story afloat of a very fast young gentleman, who, a year or two after he had come into his property, suddenly emerged from a hansom at the door, rushed up the stairs, placed a writ for eight hundred and fifty-seven pounds before the horrified Prossiter, and requested him to take the necessary steps to settle it. The joke of the *historiette* was, that Prossiter and Chudkins, literally not knowing what to do—such a thing had never occurred before in their establishment—did nothing but gasp, and finally had to send it to a much more commonplace solicitor. But they solemnly declined any further management of the young reprobate's affairs, and forwarded him his jappanned box without loss of time. However, people will tell stories. Three days after the funeral, Lord Lithfield and his co-executor, a Mr. Deblitz, were

seated in Mr. Prossiter's own private room, listening to the reading and explanation of George Latimer's will.

Mr. Prossiter was a big, heavy man, about fifty, with a rather full, sensual mouth, keen black eyes, overhung by strong black brows. A heavy-jowled man, one who gave you the idea of a slow, though shrewd thinker. You could imagine him not very ready to detect a fraud, but then, on the other hand, he was not likely to be over-credulous—one who, though you might flatter yourself, in the first instance, that you had got the blind side of, was given to reckon up the case in terribly shrewd, analytical fashion later on. Mr. Prossiter's practice had nothing whatever to do with criminal law, and yet he had the makings of a very fair Old Bailey solicitor within him.

"You understand, then, gentlemen," said Mr. Prossiter, nursing his leg, and tapping his teeth with his double-gold eyeglass—a favourite trick, and apparently of mysterious assistance to the inductive process usually simmering in his (Prossiter's) mind—"you understand that George Latimer, deceased, leaves the whole of his property, a property amounting to some five thousand a year, to his nephew, Frederick Riversley, son of Sir John Riversley, of Bunnington Park, Herts, and late of Her Majesty's Guards, subject to the deduction of some trifling legacies, which I will read out to you presently. In the event of his being dead, or all due efforts of the executors to discover him in the course of seven years having failed, then the property is to go to Arthur Riversley, son of the Rev. Mortimer Riversley, of Clumford Rectory, Clumbershire, with the reservation that, should the aforesaid Frederick Riversley ever re-appear, Arthur Riversley is to allow him one thousand a year for life out of the estate."

The Viscount listened attentively to the tenor of the will, but he was more absorbed in speculating how the deuce Mr. Deblitz came to be associated with himself as a trustee to it. What on earth had made George Latimer single out the great city financier to see his last behests carried out? Latimer had of course known him, as Lithfield himself did. Most people in society knew the great city lord, whose word either swamped or floated a loan; but, confound it! there had been no intimacy between Latimer



and Deblitz. The great Deblitz, much as he moved about London *salons*, never crossed the threshold of that inner and more exclusive circle in which poor Latimer and Lithfield spent their days. "Odd, deuced odd!" muttered the Viscount once more. "I can't imagine how he thought of Deblitz."

"Now, gentlemen," continued Mr. Prossiter, still tapping his teeth, and taking much counsel from his gold eyeglasses, "of course the question is, how are we to find Captain Frederick Riversley?"

"Advertise, I suppose," said Deblitz, shortly.

"Quite so, quite so," replied Mr. Prossiter, gravely. "Pray, Mr. Deblitz, did you know Frederick Riversley?"

"Never saw him in my life," replied the great financier.

"You, I think, knew him well, Lord Lithfield?"

"Very well—I may say, intimately."

"You have heard nothing of him since his ruin and flight?"

"Not directly, but indirectly. I think his old servant heard occasionally of him, or from him, for nearly two years after he levanted."

"And I suppose nothing has been heard of him in the London world now for some years?" inquired Mr. Prossiter.

"No, I don't think there is anybody in what was his world has heard of Fred Riversley for more than five years."

"If, Lord Lithfield, you would take the trouble to let me have a list of those intimates, either men or women, or even of confidential servants, with whom there was a likelihood of his communicating, I should be greatly obliged to you."

"I will do my best. You will, of course, write to his father, Sir John?"

"I have already done so," returned Mr. Prossiter, "and received the baronet's answer this morning. It exactly corresponds with what you tell me. He regrets 'that he has heard nothing of his son for nearly six years.' Was the captain on good terms with his father, or did they quarrel about his extravagance?"

"Not a bit—they were on excellent terms. Sir John recognized that his son was himself over again. Fred and

he never had any words about money, because there was no possibility of Sir John assisting him, even if he could. The estate had been mortgaged pretty well to the mast-head to pay for the baronet's own juvenile goings-on, and to find the five hundred a year he allowed Fred was quite as much money-raising as he was competent to grapple with. That Fred Riversley did all he could on post-obits I should think likely. There was the house, with its furniture, pictures, and plate. I have little doubt the tribes hold liens on all these; in fact I should fancy, when anything happens to Sir John Riversley, Bunnington Park and everything belonging to it will be sold, down to the last walking-stick."

"Well," said Mr. Deblitz, rising, "I don't see I can be of any more use here, and I am wanted in two or three other places, so I'll say good morning."

The Viscount nodded, and Mr. Prossiter ushered the representative of Mammon to the head of the staircase, where he shook hands unctuously with him, and promised to let him know, when he had anything to let him know about. As he re-entered his room, Mr. Prossiter observed that the Viscount was plunged into deep thought.

"We shall ferret him out, never fear, my lord. A man who has had five thousand a year left him will never fail to turn up. He'll have *friends*"—Mr. Prossiter laid a peculiar inflection on this word—"whose interest it will be to *find* him. A man, heir to that amount of money, couldn't keep concealed if he tried."

"What on earth made him do it?" said the Viscount, absently.

"Creditors, difficulties, no doubt. It is, I dare say, advisable to efface yourself, if possible, under such circumstances. That is, I should think so," continued Mr. Prossiter, cautiously; "because it is a line of business of which we have no experience."

"Pooh!" rejoined the Viscount, "I was wondering what made George Latimer pick out Deblitz as my co-executor—a man of whom he knew so little."

"Ha!" said Mr. Prossiter, drawing a long breath, and then rapidly sounding his front teeth with his glasses. "You are speculating on one of the most unfathomable subjects I ever come across. Excuse me, I have had

much experience on this point. We draw up a good many wills in the course of the twelve months, and on what grounds the testators select the executors they do, is inexplicable. Sometimes one of a family gets, by accident, the reputation of being a business-man—which he may or may not be—it makes no difference, nothing can go on in that family without his being in it. Distant cousins he never saw demand him as trustee to their marriage settlements. Nobody can make a will without his consenting to act in some shape, and, as a general rule, he is the recipient of perpetual little legacies—that's natural; but just as often the testator seems to pick a man out as executor upon no other grounds than that he knows very little of him. The late Mr. Latimer's idea was, doubtless, that Mr. Deblitz was a most superior business-man, who would be of great assistance to you in case of difficulties."

"Suppose that was it," said Lithfield, languidly. "You'll of course look to all the advertising and that. I don't think there is any more to be done at present;" and, so saying, the Viscount resumed his hat.

"A thousand pardons, my lord, but I want you to answer me one or two more questions. What sort of looking man was Captain Riversley?"

"Slight; dark; a little above middle height; trim moustache; wavy brown hair; eyes to match, but darker, and rather small, but regular features—but why?"

"Because I think it possible that a fictitious Riversley or two will favour me with a call, on the off chance of getting a little cash on account, before their imposition is exposed. I should like to have a photograph of the captain, if there is one."

"I will see about it," returned Lithfield. "You had better send such Riversleys as call across to me for identification. You don't anticipate any serious claim by an impostor?"

"Oh dear, no; nothing more than an adventurer or two, who will represent themselves as Captain Riversley, and ask for an advance of twenty pounds or so, with which to fit themselves out previous to calling on old friends. I shall refer them to you."

"All right, I'll go bail I know Fred Riversley when I see him. Good morning."



## CHAPTER III.

### CLUMFORD RECTORY.

**T**HERE are few prettier country towns in England than Clumford, capital of Clumbershire. Situated in a lovely country, you arrive at it through roads overhung by high luxuriant hedges on the one side, to depart through the stately double lime avenue on the other; for Clumford stands on the main highway, connecting the West Countries with the metropolis, and in the olden days saw quite a string of coaches working through its quiet streets. In these times Clumford has a first-class station, with refreshment-room, bookstall, and weighing machine, all complete—every supposed necessary, indeed, for the first-class passenger, who is always presumed to require papers, an exact register of his weight, heavy sausage rolls, and soda and brandy to complete his happiness on his journey.

It is a very quaint old town, not looking, although it held a good agricultural market once a week, as if it ever condescended to do any business; not showing any sign, mind, of decay or stagnation, on the contrary, looking drowsily well-to-do. Plenty of comfortable gabled houses, abutting on good-sized gardens, filled with flowers of the old sort, stocks, sweet peas, asters, and the like, stood a little off the main street, while the smart shops in the latter seemed to do no business, but rather to be kept by their proprietors for amusement. Yet, with all its drowsy

air, Clumford looked so neat and trim, one would speedily conclude there was little lack of funds, either public or private, to keep things as they should be kept; nor did the shopkeepers, if given rather to listless lolling at their doors, seem in the least despondent about the state of affairs. The fact was, Clumford and its neighbourhood boasted a snug little society of higher calibre than is usually the lot of country towns in these days; not wealthy people, but families of moderate incomes, tolerably cosy in their circumstances, though not to be counted rich. There was, moreover, a barrack and tiny garrison, which usually contributed a quota of some half-dozen young men, who were always ready to valse or play lawn tennis. Clumford had always had a troop of horse artillery and a detachment of dragoons quartered there since the days of the great struggle with Napoleon.

On the extreme verge of the town, edging almost on to the grand lime-tree avenue, which fringed the London road on its eastern side, stands a large red-brick many-gabled house, almost overrun with ivy and creepers. It is separated from the road by a short drive and shrubberies, but the real garden and grounds are at the back. On that side there is a considerable extent of bright-blooming flower-beds, of lawn, and of glass, and beyond that, again, a good-sized paddock, separated from the above by a sunk fence. This is St. Mary's Rectory, the residence of the Rev. Mortimer Riversley, brother of Sir John Riversley, of whom we have already heard.

A tall, fine-looking man, of fifty odd years, with well-cut features, spare in figure, and dressed with punctilious neatness, the Rev. Mortimer looks, as he sits at the bottom of his comfortable furnished breakfast table, a model of the old-fashioned orthodox clergyman. A gentleman from crown to heel, with neither high nor low church proclivities, but conducting his ministry in strictly orthodox fashion. He administered two mild moral lectures to his parishioners once a week, but did not disturb the even tenor of his way with regard to Saints' Days and Lenten Services. He could not be accused of worrying his flock by always poking his nose into their affairs, as, in good sooth, he rarely visited them, or inter-

ferred with them, unless sent for. He was liberal, both with wine and purse, and very attentive to his sick, let their case be once brought before him, but scarce likely to discover illness or distress on his own account. With a quiet, self-possessed, pleasant manner, he was extremely popular, doted on by his own family, although, despite his easy indolent habits, no greater domestic autocrat ever existed. His wife, his two daughters, grown up young ladies, although the elder had barely attained her majority, and his eldest son, Arthur Riversley, an undergraduate of Oxford, completed the party.

The entrance of the servant, with the post-bag, interrupted the quiet consumption of tea, ham, eggs, rolls, &c., which had been going on, so far, without much conversation—the post has a good deal to say to the talk at a country breakfast table. The rector unlocks the bag, distributes the letters, and throws out the newspapers.

“A most portentous epistle for you, Arthur,” he remarks, as he hands him a long blue envelope, with a heavy seal, and addressed in a round legal hand.

Arthur Riversley eyes this document distrustfully. He recognizes the lawyer-like aspect of the direction; he has no very serious embarrassments, but is conscious of certain Oxford ticks that have urged their claims somewhat sharply of late. Can one of his creditors have resorted to extremities? He glances round the table, but his father and mother are deep in their own correspondence. His elder sister is similarly engaged, while the youngest is busy with the *Times*. He hardens his heart, and breaks the seal. It is from Prossiter, Chudkins, and Sons, and encloses a copy of George Latimer's will, whereby he, Arthur Riversley, in the contingency of his cousin's death, or not reappearing in the course of seven years, to claim his inheritance, becomes sole heir to George Latimer's property.

The young man sits, rather dazed at first. He does not feel, and rightly, the least elation about the prospect. Arthur Riversley felt no doubt of Fred's being speedily found out under the circumstances, and it appeared that he profited in no manner by this will. He wondered what had made George Latimer think of him. A man he had

never even seen ; and when he did think of him, why did he not think of him in somewhat more tangible and practical fashion. A legacy of a thousand pounds, thought Arthur, would have been extremely useful and satisfactory, would have liquidated those Oxford ticks, and enabled him to buy a couple of hunters to amuse himself with during the next winter. True, he had no claim on Mr. Latimer, was neither kith nor kin to him ; his cousin's case was different—the late Lady Riversley having been George Latimer's sister, and, moreover, the dead man had always displayed a liking for his scapegrace nephew.

“An invitation to a dance, at Enderly, next week,” remarked Mrs. Riversley, as she came to the end of her correspondence. “I suppose I may say we'll go ? Dear me, Arthur, your letter seems to have absorbed all your faculties. I hope it is not bad news that makes you so serious ? ”

The rector raised his head, and glanced keenly at his son. He had noticed the legal appearance of that large blue envelope when he handed it to him.

“No,” replied Arthur, “it certainly cannot be called bad news, nor do I see it can be called good. But it is, I think, rather a curious thing to have happened to one. Read it, and explain to my mother and the girls what has befallen me ; ” and, with a faint smile, Arthur passed the epistle of Prossiter, Chudkins, and Sons back to his father.

The Rev. Mortimer was even more astonished than his son. He had known Latimer a little in days gone, chiefly from meeting him at Bunnington, his brother Sir John's place ; but the country rector, on his visits to town—and he always indulged in six weeks about June—was not likely to run across George Latimer, whose groove for years had run in the fastest circles of the London world. The rector expressed his surprise freely.

“To tell you the truth,” he said, “it strikes me as a very singular thing that Latimer even knew I had a son ; but that he should know his name seems to me quite unaccountable. I should have supposed his knowledge of me to amount to no more than that I was married, and had a living somewhere in the country.”

“But if cousin Fred has died abroad, Arthur will be a

rich man, won't he?" inquired Bessie Riversley, a vivacious young lady, just turned sixteen.

"And it is so many years since he has been heard of, poor fellow!" observed Mrs. Riversley.

"Nonsense!" replied the rector. "It is absurd to speculate on anything so improbable. Fred has not been heard of, because he had to fly the country. He has been under a cloud, and I am afraid it is only too likely, been pretty hard put to it to get along. No—Arthur has fallen in for a contingency, and cannot do better than recollect how a publisher's 'contingencies' were defined by a noted wit; namely, as 'things that never happen.'"

"I am sure I expect nothing whatever to come to me under this will," said Arthur, quietly. "The only hard lines are, that as Mr. Latimer chose to mention me at all, he did not *bonâ fide* leave me some small sum. Fred, I know, is different; but still, in the event of my succeeding, look what care he is taken of should he ever appear in my lifetime."

"Another contingency, my dear Arthur, about which it is quite unnecessary to trouble ourselves. No! there is only one benefit likely to come to you from this bequest."

"Indeed!" cried Arthur. "What?"

And the lips of Mrs. Riversley and her daughters all syllabled the mystic interrogatory.

"Well," said the rector, sententiously, "poor Fred was one of the most open-handed, free, generous fellows in the world; and I think, when he reads that bequest, he will feel that he ought to do something for Arthur. Coming into an excellent income under such circumstances, and bearing in mind Mr. Latimer's evident intentions with regard to Arthur, had anything happened to himself, I think a liberal-minded man like Fred would certainly present his cousin with something handsome to assist him in starting in life."

"No doubt," said Mrs. Riversley. "Still, absurd though it may be, I have a presentiment we shall never hear again of poor Fred."

The rector said, "Pooh!" Arthur shook his head with an incredulous smile. Miss Bessie observed mamma was always right in her presentiments, and how nice it would



be if Arthur was to become rich. Miss Riversley said nothing. She had been silent, as was her wont when listening to anything that interested her. She possessed that not altogether common faculty of attending closely to a subject under consideration, without seeking to join in the discussion. She was far away the shrewdest of her family, and at present had by no means made up her mind as to the effects of this "contingency." I have said she was a shrewd girl—I mean that she was, perhaps, more gifted with clear, practical common sense, than most people; sufficiently well educated, although no shining light in that respect, and I fear not likely to have been left in the last half-dozen at a spelling bee. But she was an honest, warm-hearted English girl, with sunny-brown hair, and eyes to match, a neat figure, and an undisguised passion for lawn-tennis, dancing, or other healthy amusement. A young lady of mark in Clumber-shire, as one of the pleasantest girls and best valisers in the county. People never talked of her beauty at first, but it stole upon them after a little, and they awoke to the fact that Maude Riversley was a very pretty girl, with a hand and foot that an artist might rave about. A great friend of her mother's, who had chaperoned her on some occasion just after her *débüt*, told that lady afterwards, "She was no trouble at all, my dear, and wanted no looking after—*her partners always came back.*"

Maude, turning it over in her own mind after the breakfast-party had broken up, cannot help having a vague, hazy sensation that George Latimer's will is destined to work woe to them in some shape. She cannot, for the life of her, as yet, piece out how it should do so. If, as Arthur said, it was no good, yet it could be no harm; and surely that must be the case. She often smiled at her mother's presentiments, but could not help a slight shivering one on her own account at the morning's intelligence. "It was too absurd—more absurd than mamma," she argued. There is a possibility of her prognostication coming true, unlikely though it be; but my shadowy dream—ridiculous! How can any harm come to Arthur or any of us from this far-fetched bequest?"

She was pacing a broad gravel walk bordering on the

ha-ha at the bottom of the garden whilst making these reflections, when, raising her eyes, she saw her brother coming towards her.

"Queer succession to be left, Maude," he observed, as he met her, and then, sucking hard at his pipe, relapsed into silence.

"It is," she replied at length; "but, of course, it will make no difference to you."

"No, I suppose not."

"You mean, of course not. You will take your degree, and then go the Bar, as has been your intention all along."

"Precisely. There can be nothing in this stupid will of old Latimer's. Fred will naturally be back in England before six months are over. I wonder whether he will give me something to start me in London. It would come in deuced handy, you know, Maude. Don't think I've gone a mucker at Oxford, but I owe a bit more than I care to ask the governor for."

"It's a terribly wild speculation to imagine that Fred, when he turns up, will do anything for you," replied Maude, gently.

"But he ought, you know, under the circumstances. Don't you think so yourself?"

"No! I cannot see any 'ought' about it. It is possible he might help you, but I don't imagine the world generally would see any just reason that he should."

"Girls don't understand these things," rejoined the young man, pettishly.

"It may be so," said Maude, thoughtfully. "I can but tell you how the thing appears to me."

"But you heard what my father said. He expressed himself strongly on the subject, and had no doubt Fred would feel that he was bound to do something for me when he heard the terms of his inheritance."

"Yes—and it was curious his suddenly coming round to that view, for he was almost emphatic in warning you to put no faith in what he called your 'contingency.' I don't feel to quite comprehend the thing as yet, but my impression so far is, that yours is a very will-o'-the-wisp of an inheritance."

"Well," replied her brother, thrusting his hands deep into the pockets of his trousers, "time will show. Less than a year will doubtless clear the matter up. Fred, if he's ever to turn up, will be heard of ere that. I shall be glad to have the matter settled."

"Best to think no more about it," replied his sister as she turned towards the house; but she felt as she spoke that her advice was impracticable, even were Arthur disposed to take it.

Despite the incredulity displayed in the first instance by both the rector and his son concerning the likelihood of the latter ever coming in to the late Mr. Latimer's property, slowly but steadily a belief stole over the whole family that Arthur would, in the end, grasp his inheritance. Circumstances, as we shall see, combined to strengthen this belief till it gradually became an accepted creed. Maude alone retained her original opinion that it was "a very will-o'-the-wisp of an inheritance."





## CHAPTER IV.

ETHEL CLOTHELE.

**T**HE young men of this generation have a dull time of it compared with their predecessors. They don't even understand the pet vices of those who went before them, and live so fast and freely. Take gambling for instance; well, there never was more high playing going on than there is now; but, dear me, when nobody pays, what does it matter whether the stakes are thousands or sugar plums; it must make the whole thing very monotonous. When I hear that the Honourable Septimus Hazard has lost seven thousand at Ascot, his income being between five and six hundred a year, I know the "Honourable Sept," as he is familiarly called, will be no whit inconvenienced. The payment of such a sum is so utterly beyond his compassing, he will not worry himself by attempting its liquidation. The loss of a hundred or two to a relentless creditor would have been much more intolerable. It is make-believe gambling, such as children play at in their nurseries. Play scandals are rife, club committees are called upon to interfere on intelligence of some disaster of unusual magnitude taking place upon their premises. Pure balderdash: the money no doubt has been lost—on paper, but that is all. Shooting the same: to sit on a rail and kill pheasants till you are sick, may seem sport to some people, just as playing *écarté* for a monkey a game, which neither player has got, is looked

upon as high play by others. The young men of our era are not equal to dancing. But what revels we oldsters saw at county balls and country dances some twenty odd years ago. We went for the whole "fun of the fair" in those days: what tumultuous "Sir Rogers" and wild cotillions we danced. We sometimes even broke out into comic songs at supper time, and smoked cigars about the size of a jib-boom when the hurly-burly was all over. We used to go out partridge-shooting next day after lunch in those times, and display every variety of fancy shooting in the course of the afternoon.

However, in Clumfordshire, people still clung to those primitive customs, and if they went out to dance, meant dancing, and no mistake about it. There was slight fear of a ball collapsing from inanition in the cheery west country; and the guests at Enderly had come to enjoy themselves in downright earnest, with scarce any pretence of boredom amongst them.

Enderly Park was the home of John Hainton, and distance some few miles from Clumford; a low, irregular old house, standing in a beautiful undulating park of some two hundred and fifty acres, the noble oaks of which had probably been standing when His Royal Highness the Prince of Orange came that way on his road to the throne of England. A mighty pretty property, as the public generally observed; and in thus appraising five thousand acres in a ring fence one can hardly say the public was wrong. The Haintons had been at Enderly a good many generations now. The founder of the family was supposed to have been one of the followers of Drake, Raleigh, or other of those bold sea rovers who waged such fierce war against the Spaniard, and made discovery of such unknown lands in the days of bluff Queen Bess. They won wealth, some of these wild buccaneering spirits, though many of them made a bitter ending of it, and died after terrible hardships under hideous tortures inflicted by the Spaniard or the Indian. War was carried on in those days, even by European nations, with indescribable ferocity; and between the Englishmen and the Spaniards came that little matter of religion which usually seems to warrant the treating of the captive within one's clutch after the hideous fashion of

cruel Pagan Rome: civilisation making small progress in this respect, if one-tenth of what newspapers and reports tell us be true—the Cossack, the Tcherkess, the Bulgarian, and the Koord, having shown themselves requiring no lessons from the old savage freebooters of the Spanish main.

John Hainton lived at Enderly Park with his mother. His father died a few months before he came of age, and it was only natural that the widow and John's only sister should make their home with him; "at all events," said Mrs. Hainton, with a faint smile, "till you give the old house a mistress yourself, John; and remember I most honestly hope to see you do it in time. You're young enough to bide a bit, and men pick their wives better at thirty than twenty." More than ten years had gone since that, and keen eyes though Clumford, aye, and Clumber-shire too, possessed, yet John Hainton's name had never been coupled with maiden far or near. In fact, John was not looked upon as a marrying man. He was very fond of field sports, showed much aptitude for business, and lots of strong common sense on the Clumford bench, or upon any of those numberless occasions when it behoves a country gentleman to assist in the business of the county. He went to all the balls, lawn-tennis parties, &c., that were going. He was a favourite with the generality of women, but he always preserved a thoroughly frank courteous manner that it was impossible to mistake. The most conceited of her sex could not flatter herself she had ever been on the verge of flirtation with John Hainton.

The Riversleys arrive in good time at Enderly Park. Down in Clumber-shire ten, or thereabouts, is supposed to be fitting time to commence a ball, and the band of the Clumford Volunteers is playing its gayest as John Hainton meets them near the entrance of the fine hall which served as a ball-room. Having conducted the party to make their greeting to his mother and sister, John promptly secured Maude's hand for the next valse, and after some few minutes led that young lady off to join in it.

"How nice the old hall looks," said Maude, as they strolled up the room. "Who managed the decorations? They are perfect, owing chiefly to their quiet simplicity,—

the dark oak and armour is never so well thrown out as by a few banners and masses of flowers."

"It does look well, I think, and I am a tolerably unprejudiced witness, insomuch as it is all Sara's doing."

"And the country side has done honour to it, Mr. Hainton. I think you have all our prettiest girls here this evening."

"I have striven hard," replied John, laughing, "and I think I have succeeded fairly; but then I have canvassed, ay, worked hard, for the occasion demanded it. Miss Riversley knows she stands by universal consent in the front rank of our Clumbershire belles."

"Of course," rejoined Maude, with a slight shrug of her shoulders.

"Exactly; and therefore it was unnecessary to mention to her and hers anything further than we meant a good dance, which we certainly do."

"Good gracious, Mr. Hainton, what can you mean? What do you mean more?"

"Well," replied Hainton, with a twinkle in his eye, "I told any that I discovered were not quite sure they could come, that they would miss a sight, though perhaps exercise a wise discretion. That Lady Featheringham had promised to be here with all her party, and said she should bring a London beauty with her that would extinguish the Clumbershire belles as the sun does rushlights."

"Upon my word," returned Maude, "this London beauty must be a very Venus if all the girls here to-night are to be eclipsed in that fashion. I am overcome with mingled awe and curiosity. May I ask her name?"

"Certainly, it will be public property directly she arrives—Miss Ethel Clothele."

"And is there anything else singular about her? Is she rich, or heiress, in short?"

"Well, she is singular in this wise, that she has lost her parents years ago, and seems to have no near relatives. Her duenna is, I believe, a former governess, who again has a niece or daughter, or something of that sort with her. An heiress she is to some extent, I believe, but no Miss Kilmansegg, or 'regular hundred thousand pounder.' Now we must have a turn."

They could both valse, and Maude Riversley was one of Hainton's favourite partners. As they paused, after a real good spin, a slight murmur of admiration fell upon their ears.

"The peerless Peri!" exclaimed Maude, laughing. "Go and pay your *devoir* at once, sir. As a poor country potentate we release you."

"Nonsense; go I must. Come along, you know Lady Featheringham, and can walk up with us to my mother. Besides, I mean to introduce you to Miss Clothele. You must do battle for the county to-night, and dare comparison with this metropolitan star."

"Really, Mr. Hainton," rejoined Maude, "I can scarce thank you for ordering me on desperate service, but curiosity triumphs, and I may shine in her reflected light. Forward the stormers! I feel I am one of *les enfants perdues*, and ought to have white tape on my arm according to the novelists."

As she spoke, Hainton had made his way through the crowd, and she had scarce closed her lips before they were shaking hands with Lady Featheringham, and making acquaintance with her party.

"They are right," muttered Maude, taking stock of Miss Clothele. "She is handsome, and Clumbershire might be well bid to look to its laurels to-night. Ah, that is the companion, I presume—not bad looking, but a peculiar face."

It was. People who had once met Caroline Mangerston, rarely forgot her. It was not that she was very pretty, nor yet that she was very pleasing; it was not the charm of her manner, nor assuredly was it that she was a brilliant talker, for Miss Mangerston's conversational powers were of no high order. She had a neat little figure, a profusion of fair hair, of that peculiar shade that our neighbours call *blonde cendré*, light hazel eyes, and a somewhat large mouth, not improved by rather irregular teeth; but with all that, it was a face that made an impression on you. Her acquaintances differed very much about her. Miss Riversley has just pronounced her not bad looking, but others called her positively plain, and vowed that Veron's wicked epithet, applied to such companions of *laidés de*



*camp*, was never more appropriate. One advantage she possessed, most decidedly, namely, a soft musical voice. As far as appearance goes, she was certainly severely tested. It was her fate to move through the world by the side of handsome Ethel Clothele, a tall graceful brunette, with whom but few beauties could bear comparison. Miss Mangerston remained rather a mystery to society at large. She was voted, usually, rather shy and stupid, although keen observers had been heard to express doubts about her being either one or the other—one thing, however, Miss Clothele had made society understand clearly, that she could not accept invitations which did not include her *chaperone*, Mrs. Mangerston, and that she would not accept such as did not, as a rule, include that lady's niece.

"Let me introduce you to Colonel Leslie, Miss Riversley," said Lady Featheringham; and in a few minutes Maude found herself promenading the room on the arm of that swart dragoon, who constituted one of her ladyship's party.

"Is this your first visit to the West of England?" asked Maude.

"Yes—indeed, since a boy, I have seen but little of my own country. My life has been spent in India—this is only my third trip home in five-and-twenty years."

"I don't think I should like such banishment," said Maude, softly. "It seems terrible to lose sight of one's own people for so long a time."

"What would you have, Miss Leslie? The patrimony of the Leslie's is but of a limited extent, and the cadets of the family have for generations earned their living by their swords. I suppose we are none of us clever—at all events, we have always preferred the chance of hard blows to the certainty of hard study. We are a tough race, and always make decent soldiers, insomuch as we take a deal of killing—a very important point when you come to campaigning. Remember, I am not alluding to fighting, but to the rough work, hard fare, and sickness, to which many of our profession succumb."

"Ah! I see you are a race of iron constitutions."

"Well, I don't quite know that," rejoined the Colonel, laughing; "but we are, as I told you, tough, with a faculty

of getting over fevers and getting along on inferior food. No very high attributes, I am afraid, but very useful to a soldier all the same."

"And, of course, you have seen a good deal of fighting?"

"Yes, I have been in pretty well most of the shindies that have taken place during my sojourn in Bengal; but excuse me, Miss Riversley, I want to ask you a question. Are you any relation to the Captain Frederick Riversley who came, so unexpectedly, into a fortune the other day?"

"His cousin," replied Maude; "but I did not know that he had as yet been heard of. I thought he had disappeared, and the lawyer or trustees, or whatever they are, could discover no trace of him."

"I fancy nothing has been heard of him as yet; there are half-a-dozen reports as to where he was last seen, flying about the clubs. In the Rocky Mountains, in San Francisco, in New York, at Homburg, at Spa, &c.; all, I believe, without any real foundation. You see, he was a well-known and popular man in the London world, and though that world has no time to weep much for those who come to infinite grief in its midst, yet it is always willing to welcome back the prodigal whenever he can find the means to return to it."

"I understand; and poor Fred has probably had a hard life of it all these years. I knew but little of him; he was a good bit older than any of us, and he didn't often come our way. Question for question, Colonel Leslie. Do you not admire Miss Clothele?"

"I think she is simply the handsomest woman I ever saw," rejoined Ralph, bluntly.

Maude looked at him curiously, for a moment, and then remarked, "In the very little I have seen of her, I should think she was utterly unaffected, in spite of her beauty."

"You are quite right," rejoined Leslie, "I never met a more perfectly frank, unaffected girl, in my life. Her thorough honesty is to me her greatest charm."

"She's an old acquaintance of yours, of course, Colonel," observed Maude, demurely.

"No; not exactly: I met her in London this season," returned Leslie, slowly.

He had known Ethel Clothele about six weeks, and was as completely her slave as the veriest boy might have been, of which fact Maude Riversley had already more than an inkling; though further than a woman's natural curiosity, in a love affair, it mattered nothing to her.

John Hainton here came up to claim her hand, and, with a bow to Colonel Leslie, Maude once more yielded herself to his guidance.

"I think it isn't a bad ball," said Hainton; "I am sure I deserve this galop with you, for I have done my duty manfully. I have never been idle, and danced with every one I ought."

"Miss Clothele included," rejoined Maude.

"Of course, I couldn't possibly help asking the stranger in the land, more especially when the strange damsel was so wondrous fair to gaze upon. I like her, too, for she gives herself no airs, and I have come across London belles, at times, who took wondrous pains to let me know I was unaccepted in Belgravia—and only a provincial—quite without the pale.

"She's too handsome to be in doubt about receiving homage," said Miss Riversley, disdainfully. "It is the *would-be* beauties that give themselves airs—of course you asked Miss Mangerston—I've had no opportunity of telling you, but Lady Featheringham gave me a hint, that Miss Clothele did expect her friend looked after, in the matter of partners."

"God bless me! I beg your pardon, for one moment," and Hainton looked at his card. "I *have* put my foot in it. I asked her for this very galop, and there she is, sitting out, and looking at me. Well, it is no use now; I quite forgot her—not much to be wondered at when you vouchsafed to be my partner. Let us have one more turn before it finishes."

"You don't deserve it, after behaving so badly; but I can only consent after so pretty a speech."

If there was one thing Caroline Mangerston was insatiable about, it was dancing. She was an adept in the art, and rarely accustomed to sit out. She might have little to say, but there was no lighter valser in London, and that, coupled with Ethel's introductions, usually

sufficed to fill her card. She had even refused other invitations for this very galop, so it may easily be imagined she viewed Mr. Hainton's delinquency with no little asperity, extending that feeling, as was but natural, to the partner of his crime. She might not be clever, but she was quite capable of brooding keenly over an unintentional affront, and if she accepted apology with smiling face, of remembering it as a debt of which she would exact relentless acquittance, should she ever have the opportunity.

I verily believe we make bitterer enemies by such petty sins of omission and carelessness, than we do when we give people good cause not to love us. At all events, John Hainton was doomed to find his slip of memory sternly registered against him, and to experience such trouble as it is possible for a vengeful and malicious woman to bring about.





## CHAPTER V.

“CAPTAIN RIVERSLEY WANTED.”

**S**IX months have gone by since George Latimer made an end of it, and “went over to the majority.” Society in various country houses, with the aid of claret and cigars, has discussed his will and the whereabouts of Fred Riversley. The subject has been talked over in well-curtained, well-carpeted drawing-rooms, over shooting lunches in farmhouse or barn, by the cover side, and at last Society gets bored with the enigma of Fred Riversley’s fate, and comes to the conclusion that if he is not dead he ought to be. Society naturally argues that the clear bounden duty of any man left a property is to turn up promptly when advertised for, and at once announce what he means to do for it—Society. So, upon the whole, the public mind ceases to interest itself concerning the whereabouts or destiny of that luckless Guardsman, except in the case of a few far-sighted matrons, who, being blessed with marriageable daughters, sought for information concerning the next heir; quite a pleasant little crop of festivities fructifying for Arthur Riversley when, his university career finished, he shall settle himself in town.

But if Society generally had ceased to concern itself about Fred Riversley, it was much the reverse with most of the people more nearly connected with the absentee. Lord Lithfield was continually writing or dropping in on

Mr. Prossiter to know if he had any news, and receiving as constant replies in the negative. One or two applications there had been from places on the Continent in which Captain Riversley had requested a remittance of twenty or thirty pounds to enable him to return to England and claim his inheritance. But Mr. Prossiter was quite prepared for this; and when the handwriting was submitted to Sir John or other of Fred's old intimates, it had always been decisively agreed that it was not his. Lord Lithfield, although he had known the missing man well, had no knowledge of his handwriting, and more than once questioned whether it was not possible for a man's handwriting to completely change in seven years.

“Possible, but not probable,” returned the lawyer; “so I am informed by one of our best experts whom I have consulted. Still, I have guarded against that contingency by writing back to say that a letter from the bankers of the place to their London correspondents, and another from the Protestant chaplain vouchsafing for the truth of the statement, would justify us in sending out a clerk with ample funds to enable the heir of Mr. Latimer to return to England forthwith. I have found it sufficed, my lord; we have been troubled by no further letters on the subject.”

Mr. Prossiter himself was as deeply interested as Lord Lithfield in what might be the result of that perpetual advertisement in the *Times*, by which Frederick George Riversley, late Captain in Her Majesty's Grenadier Guards, and son of Sir John Riversley, of Bunnington Park, was informed that, by communicating with Messrs. Prossiter and Chudkins, of ———, Lincoln's Inn Fields, he would be informed of the particulars of a property lately bequeathed to him.

Sir John Riversley, too, was keenly excited about it. He was growing old, and the wild life he had led in his younger days was telling its tale. Standing as he did all alone in the world, with shattered health and equally shattered income, it was small wonder that he should yearn to see his only child at home again. Father and son had parted good friends, but Sir John was stronger then, and knew that he was bowing to the inevitable.

Fred was hopelessly ruined, and he, Sir John, could do nothing to assist him. Brooding in solitude at Bunnington this last year or so, for the gout and ill-health had compelled him to a great extent to forswear society, the old man could not but muse sadly over the prospects of his race. His death would be the signal for the sale of the heritage of his forefathers; the Riversleys would be blotted out from the county gentlemen of Hertfordshire, while their representative would be a poverty-stricken wanderer on the face of the earth; but when the news came of George Latimer's will, the baronet's spirits rose again. Fred would turn up before long, and with this unlooked-for fortune that had fallen to him redeem the broad lands of Bunnington. Still the months glide by, and no tidings reach England concerning Fred Riversley; he is neither heard from nor heard of, and whether he is alive or dead is yet matter of perfect uncertainty. It is, moreover, a subject on which those more immediately interested differ somewhat in proportion to the manner it affects themselves. Old Sir John, for instance, has no doubt whatever that his son is alive though undiscovered, while the rector and Arthur are coming rapidly to the conclusion that Fred Riversley is no longer in this world. Lithfield and Mr. Prossiter, again, are undecided.

"It is most extraordinary that he should never have seen the advertisement if he's anywhere on this earth," quoth the Viscount.

"I don't know about that," rejoined the lawyer. "There are thousands of educated people in this same metropolis who never see the *Times* from one year's end to the other."

"Then advertise in all the papers!" exclaimed Lithfield.

"I think we must, although the *Times*, especially with regard to 'the agony column,' is supposed to be more looked at than any other. Still, the *Telegraph* and *Standard* are taken in places where the 'Jupiter' never penetrates. You're right, my lord—we will advertise all round."

And so it came to pass that the whole daily press were speedily engaged in informing Captain Frederick Riversley that a property had been bequeathed him.

Watching all this with vulture-like eyes also were several of the leading money-lenders, who possessed amongst their hopelessly regarded assets several bills of the missing man. They had looked upon these pretty much as folks do Turkish Stock nowadays—as not quite to be put in the fire, but with very slight idea that it will ever be worth a florin in the pound. But property of any kind meant money. Let only their creditor put foot in London, and they had determined to so lay him by the heels that he should not escape their grip until they had arrived at a satisfactory composition of some sort with him. They had little difficulty in discovering where the property came from, and many of them, from personal dealings, could form a pretty shrewd idea of what Latimer would die worth. It is the business of these men to know such things, and the knowledge is not very difficult to acquire by those unscrupulous about the means.

"It looks goot, it sounds goot, mine goot friends," observed little Nathan, after a lengthened conference with some of his colleagues. "If we mindst what we's about, we shall get our monies in full after all these years."

"Don't be a fool, Nathan," rejoined Mr. Samuel Gregson, who was the largest of Riversley's creditors. "If we mind what we are about, we shall get our own with moderate interest, but if we try for too much we shall probably get nothing. Remember, I counsel a fair compromise. The Captain will scarce return the pigeon he went away. Lord, what 'dead 'uns' he did back, to be sure! He's not likely to be such a fool as to show himself about town until he's made arrangements with us."

"But he'll have to pay uth. S'help me Motheth, he'll have to pay uth all."

"Pooh," said Gregson, "he's used to the Continent by this; and if we threaten trouble, he's got nothing to do but stay abroad. He may have a wife, and settle everything on her, and then where are you? 'Six weeks for contempt' don't frighten a man much; and when he comes out of Holloway at the end of it, what else can you do?"

Down in Clumbershire, as may be easily imagined, the existence or non-existence of Fred Riversley was quite a



theme of popular discussion. It was not to be supposed that the gist of George Latimer's will was long confined to the Rectory. The members of that family were at first reticent in the extreme on the subject, but ere a fortnight had gone by there were rumours afloat in Clumford. Ere the month was out the story was countryside property, and it was a farce for the Riversleys to preserve further mystery concerning it. Naturally Clumbershire henceforth became considerably excited about the return of the missing heir, more especially as Clumbershire argued that it held the next best trump. Arthur Riversley found himself becoming quite a popular young man in the county, and, as the months rolled by and nothing was heard of his missing cousin, began to be received as heir to a good estate. This was not calculated to check the good opinion which Mr. Arthur Riversley had always entertained of himself. No young gentleman out could have dropped into the rôle of an eldest son more readily than he did, and such an unexceptionally placid eldest son—no uncertainty about how long his esteemed sire might live to be taken into the calculations. His father's life had nothing to say to it. In six years or so he would come into his property, for the first year of those seven is on the wane, and he and those about him began to question the probability of Fred's being alive. Arthur had managed to take a degree, albeit very low down in the list. He had also managed to considerably increase his Oxford debts during that last term, living, indeed, more in accordance with his supposed prospects than his actual means. It was curious, too, at home how he was humoured in this view of the case. The rector, who had manifested so much scepticism upon reading that first letter from Prossiter and Cludkins, who had so often sternly intimated that his son was to look to him for very slight increase of income upon settling in London, and that he considered four hundred a year a liberal allowance for a young gentleman reading for the Bar, willingly admitted Arthur's claim for an increase in this respect on the grounds of the additional expenses necessitated by his position. It pleased the Rev. Mortimer to see his son making his way into the best houses in the county, and he knew none

better, that, though, as far as family went, the Riversleys, albeit not Clumbershire people, were fully entitled to ruffle it with the best of the county. Yet the son of the Rector for Clumford would have never been taken up by the powers of Clumbershire if it had not been for his prospects. As for Mr. Arthur, his prospects were undoubtedly rosy in the extreme and pleasant in his sight. At the expiration of a few weeks more he was to be launched in London to read for the Bar. "With," as that gentleman argued, "a tolerable allowance, and no necessity, for the present at all events, of grinding beastly law books, life about town ought to be tolerably pleasant, to say the least of it." Besides, the probability was there never would be occasion for him to work at it as a profession, and in the meantime he must eat those abominable dinners as best he might.

Another thing consequent on Arthur's sudden popularity was, that invitations to stay in country houses poured in upon his people. These were more or less accepted, and before long Maude was in almost as great request as her brother. A pretty girl, full of fun, with a natural turn for theatricals, games, dancing, &c., was invaluable. She went about sometimes with her parents, but often only under her brother's escort, and it so happened in the course of all this visiting that she saw a good deal of Ethel Clothele, who was wandering from house to house through that country. The pair struck up a close alliance, and became friends. That the missing Fred Riversley should be discussed between them was but natural. Ethel had heard an imperfect version of the story already, and was rather interested in the romance of the thing.

"Everybody seems to agree now, Maude, that your brother will be the eventual inheritor of Mr. Latimer's estate," said Ethel, as the pair sat cosily enjoying their tea over the fire in Miss Clothele's room at Barnsborow Castle, the seat of Lord Prosenbore, a distinguished light in the political circles of the day, and in whose mansion revels were at this present being held.

"I don't think so," returned Maude. "I see nothing but ruin for Arthur in every line of that ill-omened will. I see his youth wasted, his profession neglected, his

temper soured, and all for a shadow, a pitiful ghost of an inheritance, an inheritance which the right man will step forth from the darkness to claim just as it has wrought the utter destruction of my poor brother. Weak, but sanguine and clever, left to depend upon his own exertions in this world, it was very possible that Arthur might have won his way. But—God forgive Mr. Latimer!—no Mephistopheles that ever stepped could have planned so terrible a trap for my poor brother as this dreadful will. Excuse me if I speak strongly, Ethel, I feel so—and none the less because I alone refuse to believe in Fred's death, none the less because I see what this visionary inheritance will so assuredly do for Arthur."

"I understand," rejoined Miss Clothele. "I can easily imagine that nothing can be so against a man's working hard as the idea he has no necessity to work at all. But, believe me, I have heard your brother's case discussed a good deal, and most men of the world that I have talked with incline strongly to the belief that Fred Riversley will be never more heard of."

"Let us talk no more about it, please," said Maude, wearily. "I know he will, but my knowledge is intuitive, and incapable of explanation. Saturday you return to London, Ethel, and I shall see you no more."

"Hush! you must not say that," interposed Miss Clothele, quickly. "You will come to town later on, and I shall be very angry if you do not come and see me."

"Ah, but one never really does see one's friends in London in the season."

"There I think you make a mistake—we do see our intimates, but only those. Our friends! well, they pass by in the crowd, and I'll admit we perchance see little of them. You, Maude Riversley, are one of my intimates, and will be duly put in possession of all the secret signs and passwords," concluded Ethel, laughing.

Maude pressed her friend's hand in acknowledgment of this last speech, and then fell to stirring her tea in absent fashion. She was by no means a gushing or impressionable young lady, but she had been marvellously attracted by Ethel Clothele, and with good reason; for Ethel had considerably more than her beauty to recommend her in

her frank, free, generous disposition. Fearless, and holding her opinions with no shame concealing them, not heeding particularly whether Society coincided in her views or not, Miss Clothele was at times pronounced “so odd, you know;” but, as a beauty and a heiress, she not only was allowed to go her own way, but Society sometimes even adopted her view of the matter, qualifying their former criticism in this wise, “Odd, but so clever, you know.” Good Lord! to think if one knew as much as Society would have us believe we do in these days, when every *gobemouche* prefaces his story with those dread words.





## CHAPTER VI.

### THE UNIVERSITY MATCH.

**T**his is once more the height of a London season, and still there are no tidings of the missing Fred Riversley. Maude is in town with her own people, and is enjoying herself thoroughly. The Rev. Mortimer has taken a prettily furnished little house in May Fair for six weeks, and the family generally were sipping all the sweets of London at its maddest. The pictures, the park, the opera, and society amply employed all their time, and Maude, at all events, thoroughly revelled in everything. She was of far too fine a physique to feel tired, and of far too free and unspoilt a nature to be bored. Dance, dinner, garden-party, play, an afternoon at Lord's, or at ducking, perchance, at Hurlingham or Ascot, she enjoyed it all. John Hainton also was up from Clumbershire, and much given to volunteering his services as guide and escort. It was obvious not only to Maude herself, but to her saucy sister and her father and mother, that the squire of Enderly was undoubtedly paying her much more attention than, courteous as he invariably was to them, it was his custom to bestow upon any individual woman. That the Rev. Mortimer and his wife should view this with favourable eyes was only natural. John Hainton was a most desirable son-in-law in every way. Maude herself, modest maiden though she was, had once or twice asked herself whether she really

could love this man, should he ask her hand, but had shelved the question with the reflection that it would be time enough to make up her mind when the question arose.

Despite all the whirl in which they both lived, Maude contrived to see a good deal of her friend Ethel Clothele. The professions of that young lady had not been like so many professions that stars of the London world are apt to make in their rustic sojournings. Ethel's door was never shut against her friend; and not only that, but the popular beauty procured numberless pleasant invitations for Maude from people who, but for Miss Clothele's interposition, would not even have been aware of her existence. Miss Riversley, as I have already said, was a quick-witted, lively girl, who invariably made her way whenever she got a start; and no sooner was it made known that she was one of Ethel's closest intimates, than invitations fell pretty thick upon her and hers. You see the name was known on Society's "change." Sir John had made a figure in the best circles of the London world in his day, and his scapegrace son had been known in the inner sanctuary after him.

His sister's success naturally gave Arthur Riversley—now settled in chambers in the Temple, and presumed studying for the Bar—a considerable lift in Society. Then he, of himself, was an interesting person, as holding the possible reversion of George Latimer's estate.

"Quite interesting, really, to look at a young man who may be promoted from pauperism to tolerable affluence," said Lady Cardslipper to Lord Baccart, putting up her glasses.

"Very; must feel as if he had got a rare good treble-event bet, or had invented an infallible martingale, I should think," replied the noble baron, who had dedicated much time and thought to such studies.

But there were a good many people who, pretty much as the country-people had done in Clumbershire, accepted Arthur Riversley as Latimer's heir, arguing his cousin Fred would have been heard of ere this, if he were ever to be heard of again.

Another person Miss Riversley began to see a good deal

of under her present circumstances, and who rapidly occupied a high place in her favour, was Ralph Leslie. She appreciated his chivalrous courtesy to her sex, the thoroughness and straightforwardness of his character. What Leslie thought on any matter on which it behoved him to give an opinion, he had the courage to say and to stand by. Not quite so common a virtue this as men may deem it. There are plenty of us who only speak half our minds on such occasions, and are apt to semi-shuffle out of such semi-expressed judgment as we have permitted our tongue to avow, upon finding that the majority is against us. Leslie, too, was attracted by very much the same qualities in Maude, so that it was small wonder the pair speedily became close allies, a state of affairs which John Hainton viewed with jaundiced eyes, and some little asperity.

But there was one person who regarded Maude's intimacy with the heiress and London success with the bitterest dislike, and that was Caroline Mangerston. As we know, it had been Miss Riversley's misfortune to be accessory to a slight put upon her at their first meeting, and Caroline Mangerston was one of those natures that treasure up and brood morbidly over such trifling *contretemps*. If she said little, she observed keenly; and her somewhat shy manner was, to some extent, assumed. It covered her lack of conversation, and Miss Mangerston was not gifted in clothing her thoughts with language. Another point in her character, though carefully masked, was an extreme jealousy about the friendship of Ethel. She invariably viewed with dislike and distrust any lady who appeared likely to become a favourite with Miss Clothele. She was as sincerely attached to Ethel as it was in her nature to be attached to any one; but, as she was a girl of few intimacies, so, where she did give her friendship, it was of that passionate, jealous nature, liable to turn round and rend the object of it with relentless animosity in the moment of her wrath, albeit the tears of remorse might flow freely, her anger once expended.

Miss Clothele had no idea of the real nature of her quiet, rather shy companion, for Caroline Mangerston was not demonstrative, and yet her devotion for the heiress

was as intense as her jealousy concerning it. She was continually tortured by Ethel's new intimacies, and pictured herself as relegated completely to the background, and relapsing into the position of any other dependent of her class, and it had so far been very different. It was sweet to her to be Ethel's great confidante, to mix in the world under the shield of Miss Clothele's protection; and she knew well that the heiress was inflexible upon the point that she should be treated with all the respect due to herself. And should she allow Maude Riversley to step between her and all this? Not if she could prevent it. She had taken a dislike to Maude as being Hainton's partner in that valse which he should have danced with her at Enderly; but now, as she saw the daily increasing intimacy between the two girls, she began to conceive a positive hatred for Miss Riversley, and began to look anxiously around as to how she might cause a rupture between them; and, if in so doing she could work woe to Maude, so much the better; that thought would nerve, not stay her hand. In the meantime she could but wait her opportunity. We do not resort to such clumsy expedients as daggers and poisoned bowls in the nineteenth century; but vindictive people deal out as cruel reprisals even nowadays in good society, though it is etiquette to receive the fatal thrust with an easy smile, and wrestle with your anguish in the silence of your chamber.

It is a glorious summer afternoon; the fierce July sun shines down upon the beautiful four-acre lawn of Lord's, now ringed by carriages, drags, and spectators. Ladies in all their bravery, in cream-coloured cashmeres, in light silks of bronze, sage green, light blue, dark blue, of every shade, of every hue. Red parasols, white, black, striped, &c.; the circle looks like a flower garden, around which black coated bipeds, with flowers in their buttonholes, perpetually gyrate. On the roofs of coaches, on tables beneath the trees, at the nursery end, in tents at the back of the pavilion, endless lunches, merging into continuous afternoon teas, incessantly go on. The light laughter of the women is mingled with rounds of enthusiastic applause. interspersed with cries of "Oh, played!" "fielded!" "well hit!"



It is four o'clock in the afternoon of the first day of the University match, as the big iron gates at the east-end of the ground swing back to admit the entrance of a dark claret coach, with a team of four iron-greys, which, sweeping round to the left, proceed at foot's-pace to the ground secured for them on the upper side of the pavilion. Lord Lithfield's handsome *blasé* face looks down from the box seat, while his fair companion is also well known to us. Miss Clothele sits beside the Viscount, and on the bench behind them are Miss Mangerston, Miss Riversley, her brother, and Colonel Leslie. Some two or three men were at the back of the drag, the boot of which, if it did not contain lunch, had all the necessaries for a most elaborate tea—from "the appetizer" and cake, to hyson and champagne cup.

"There, Miss Clothele," said the Viscount, as, having at length manœuvred his coach into its allotted berth, the grooms led away the horses. "Now, I am once more able to talk to you, but the crowd is so great, and the road so narrow, that it is necessary to pay attention to where one is going, or even at foot's-pace one might upset something or somebody."

"Quite so, and I hope you noticed how beautifully I behaved. I uttered not a syllable to distract your attention. It could be, at the pace we were going, no selfish apprehensions tied my tongue, you can be certain. Simply philanthropic motives."

"Ten thousand thanks!—on which side are your sympathies enlisted?"

"I should say Oxford, if I were a humbug, because I see you have on a dark blue scarf; but I understand nothing about the game. I like the show, to see the dresses, to see one's acquaintances, and to enjoy a pleasant party with pleasant people, in what is to us Londoners, just now, virtually 'the country.' If you want an enthusiast you must look behind you. Maude plays cricket, at least, you did, my dear, a couple of years back—didn't you?"

"Not quite so recently as that; but I have bowled and fagged out for Arthur, as a girl," laughed Miss Riversley.

"Yes, and she was a very decent bowler, too, Miss Clothele," said Arthur, "till the time came when she was demoralised, and made a young lady of."

This gentleman was extremely satisfied with his present position. It was not only pleasant to be seen—I am afraid he thought more about that than seeing—but to be able to say to his friends of the Temple afterwards, “At the Oxford and Cambridge—oh, yes, I went on Lithfield’s drag; had to take care of my sister, you know.” That last turn to the sentence was artistic, embodying, as it did, self-sacrifice to his sister, and how the extent to which he was sought in aristocratic circles bored him.

“You must explain all this to me, Mr. Riversley,” said Ethel, turning round. “Don’t be too technical, please, but couch your explanation in what you would doubtless call the most childish of English, and then be prepared to find I don’t understand you. Give me only a general idea of the game, as to which side is winning, and whether any particular interest attaches to the men now in. Ha, what does that cheer mean—a man out, is it not? I see one returning to the pavilion?”

“Yes, Miss Clothele, the light blues are cheering; they have disposed of one of our most dangerous bats for a mere trifle. Rather a disaster for our people this, as we counted on his making a good many runs before he was sent back; but it is the luck of the game; the best players sometimes fail at a pinch, and the rather despised tail of the eleven, that is, those who are sent in towards the end, as of small account, make the score.”

“I understand; we see that in the world generally. The unknown men in everything come unexpectedly to the front, and beat those about whom such great things are predicted.”

Arthur took refuge in silence. He thought the heiress was getting a trifle didactic, still he was highly flattered at the duty assigned to him, and more by accident than design was achieving that rather uncommon discretion of holding his tongue when he had nothing to say.

“Now, tell me how the game goes,” said Ethel, after a slight pause, during which it had been, what the initiated would call, slow cricket. The batsman, who had just arrived at the wicket, was feeling his way. The one he found there was celebrated for his defence, but he possessed no capacity for free hitting, which is what amuses

the general public. That invaluable man in an eleven, who can nearly always be depended upon to keep up his wicket and bully the bowling—albeit, he may get few runs—is appreciated only by the connoisseurs of the game.

“Cambridge, Miss Clothele, finished their first innings for one hundred and seventy-three. Our people, by which I mean Oxford, you know, are now in, and we have lost two wickets for twenty-one runs; and, sad to say, the two out are two of our best men.”

“Then it looks rather against you dark blues,” said Ethel.

“Nonsense! don’t be faint hearted, Arthur—ah, well played, well hit, Mr. Lackington. No, he cannot save it—four, it’s through the ropes. He gets runs very often, does he not, Arthur?” exclaimed Maude, who was now heart and soul in the match.

No need to ask which side she espoused. Her dark blue necktie and the corresponding flowers in her bonnet told that. In fact, there was an Oxford tint about the whole drag, from the noble owner’s scarf to the corn-flowers in the buttonholes of his grooms—from the dark blue rosettes of the horses, to the deeply azure-tinted posies at the ladies’ breasts.

“Yes,” answered Arthur, “Lackington is a bit uncertain, but he’s dangerous when it’s his day.”

“And it is his day!” cried enthusiastic Maude. “Oh, bravo, bravo!” and she clapped her hands, as Mr. Lackington, now beginning to feel at home at the wicket, hit the Cambridge slow bowler to leg for two.

But in the very next over came further disaster to Oxford; that able exponent of defence, in the ardour of his vocation, got his leg “in front,” and was adjudicated out “leg before.” Three for thirty-five.

“That’s bad,” said Maude; “Mr. Stayer was a more useful man even than a run-getter, in an up-hill game such as this is, don’t you think so, Arthur?”

“You’re quite right. This is Mullins coming in now; he is something in Lackington’s style, but not so good—a tremendous hard hitter. The game will be lively now, Miss Clothele. Mullins never wastes time at the wicket, he either makes runs or goes. He will either be out, or he’ll make twenty runs in the next quarter of an hour.”

The mighty Mullins thoroughly justified Arthur's account of him. He made two mighty swipes to the ropes for four each, and a third hit of similar calibre, but which a brilliant piece of fielding on the part of Cambridge reduced to two. His eleventh ball he lifted far towards the heavens—a big hit, but the long-field-on was equal to the occasion, and Mullins, the great slogger of the Oxford team, received his *quietus*, and retired slowly to the pavilion.

"Oh dear," said Ethel, "that is bad for our side, is it not, Lord Lithfield."

"Four for forty-eight," remarked the Viscount, as he looked at the telegraph-board. "Yes, it doesn't look well. I've laid three hundred to two hundred on the old colours, and it seems rather that the other way at present."

However, as regards the remainder of the Oxford team, although no one man made a great score, yet they all contributed something.

The one exception was Lackington, who was not got rid of till he had put fifty-eight runs together. In short, when the last wicket of the dark blues fell, they were only twenty-nine runs behind their enemies of the Cam, after all.

"Ten minutes to six!" exclaimed the Viscount; "on my word, Miss Clothele, I beg you pardon. Miss Riversley, Miss Mangerston, pray forgive me. I was so absorbed in the game, I forgot all about your necessities. Here, Philip, look sharp—tea, claret-cup, hock, and seltzers, and everything else there is to eat and drink."

Lord Lithfield's servitors had had a gipsy fire, and a kettle simmering upon it, going for the last hour under the wall, so his orders were speedily attended to.

"That lady seems rather struck with some of us," said Leslie quietly to Maude, as he took a cup of tea from the servant and handed it to her.

"Which?" inquired Maude, curiously.

A slight elevation of the Colonel's eyebrows, and a glance of his eye, apprised her of the direction in which she should look. On the grass just below their drag, and not ten paces distant from it, an extremely handsome woman of middle age was surveying them with great

attention. She was well and richly dressed, while the man on whose arm she leaned looked like a gentleman, to say the very least of him. Still Leslie was right, this lady did stare at the occupants of the drag in a fashion rather exceeding that warranted on such occasions by well-bred people, and both she and her cavalier apparently would come under that denomination.

"People will look at Ethel, you know, Colonel Leslie; she must pay the penalty of having made a reputation," laughed Maude. "By the way, do you know, Viscount, who it is that is taking such interest in us?"

"Interested in us?" rejoined Lithfield, laughing; "why, half the people here are, I should hope, or else what is the use of my crowning my coach with the Graces. Where is he? Whom do you mean?"

"It isn't a him," laughed Maude. "I'm alluding to that lady in a mixture of heliotrope and black, with all jet trimmings."

Lithfield turned abruptly round, and, to Maude's astonishment, received a slight laughing nod from the lady in question. The Viscount raised his hat in return, and then inquired anxiously whether Miss Clothele would take another cup of tea.

Miss Riversley might be new to London, but she knew, as women instinctively always do know, that it was best to leave further inquiring about the lady in heliotrope and black, not so common a little time ago as it is now.

"You take a deep interest in sport of all kinds, Miss Riversley," said Leslie, in his deep mellow tones.

"Yes, I think I do. You see I am country bred, and a cricket match or a 'hot corner' always interest me. I like to pick out my gun when I come down with the luncheon, and woe betide them if they do not do their *devoir*. Country racing I've seen of course, but this was my first Ascot. I went down with Ethel and Lord Lithfield, as you know; although it's not quite the right word, I can only say it's *heavenly*."

And here, as an honest chronicler of events, I must invite the reader's attention to the fact that no lady of this party has displayed the slightest wish to leave her seat. If it has ever been your luck to escort ladies to Lord's, you

must know that they are always restless, that no seat contents them, they are always wanting to move about. As for the game, nine-tenths of them neither understand it nor care to, but if you can once bestow your fair charge upon a drag, depend upon it, she will never want to move until play is over. That fulfils all the requirements of her heart ; not only can she see, but, much more important, she can be seen.

“ Ah ! here are the dark blues turning out again,” exclaimed the Viscount ; “ very close upon an hour yet before stumps are drawn, time enough to see my foes from the Cam discomfited to some extent, if only the Fates be propitious.”

Watching the drag closely at some short distance is a tall stalwart man, whose frank blue eyes look no little troubled at the sight of it. John Hainton, after the wont of men entangled for the first time in Cupid’s meshes, is strangely mistrustful of himself. He, cool, calm, self-reliant in the business transactions of life, the wild delirium of the hunting field, or the fierce tumult of the betting ring, is nervous and wanting confidence as soon as he finds himself in Maude Riversley’s presence. It is curious, this sensation. Arguing it over to himself, Hainton feels, in a worldly point of view, that he ought not to mistrust a favourable answer, but then, poor fellow, he is dreadfully in earnest, and when that is the case—well, to put it mildly, the male creature does not figure to advantage. There is Ethel Clothele, for instance. To aspire to her hand would, he knows, be much more presumptuous, and yet John Hainton feels that to ask Ethel to marry him would be infinitely easier than to put that question to Maude. He would scorn to acknowledge it, but he does not quite like Lord Lithfield’s attentions to the lady of his love, and cannot even disguise from himself that he feels decidedly uncomfortable on the subject of Colonel Leslie. He has some warranty for this. As before said, the Colonel and Maude had become great friends—friends and nothing more—but how was a man seriously wounded to know this ? It is not so easy even for the cool practised veteran who is watching the game to say when a maiden’s heart is touched, but a man over head and ears in love would feel jealous of his charmer’s uncle, not knowing

him to be such. To any one with unbiassed judgment, the thorough frankness and cordiality exhibited by Maude and the Colonel in their relations to each other would have been quite sufficient guarantee that no warmer feeling than friendship existed between them. John Hainton, sore afflicted, and seeing with all the glamour of the complaint, was glancing rancorously at the drag, and debating whether he should go and speak to Maude or not. He didn't know Lord Lithfield, it was true, but he knew the remainder of the party.

He strode across and made his bow.

"Delighted to see you, Mr. Hainton," said Ethel, as she stretched out her hand. "Lord Lithfield, let me introduce you to one of my hosts in the west counties, one who bestowed upon me dancing, supper, and other diversions, such as we women love."

"You're a bold man, Mr. Hainton," laughed the Viscount, as he raised his hat, and glanced at the light blue favour John wore in his button-hole, "to venture into such a violent camp of the opposite faction as we are here. However, you may trust to there being neither hemlock in the wine nor anything pernicious in the sandwiches. Champagne here, Philip. Won't you come up? You can make room for him, Riversley, eh?"

Arthur took the hint, and swung himself on the roof of the coach, and, though deprecating this arrangement, Hainton could not resist the temptation of occupying the place next the lady of his love.

"Ah, Mr. Hainton," exclaimed Maude, as she cordially welcomed him, "it's not your fault, you know, that you went to the wrong university."

"The right, I'm afraid, Miss Riversley," laughed the Viscount, "that is, as far as this day's cricket goes. These two Cambridge men are putting runs together in a manner that bodes us no good. If they are not parted speedily, our chances will look decidedly hazy."

"I may be unwittingly speaking with a bias," rejoined Hainton, "but I think we are a good bit the stronger team. We ought to be further in front than we are; however, there is a good deal of luck always in cricket."

In the meantime, the lady who had before attracted

Ralph Leslie's attention, again passed the drag, and once more favoured its occupants with a most comprehensive stare. The Colonel and Miss Mangerston alone noticed the fair scrutineer upon this occasion.

"In which of us is that woman interested?" mused Caroline Mangerston. "There's something more than idle curiosity in her steady stare; one of the men most likely, I wonder which of them?"

"She ought to be able to swear to young Riversley in a court of justice," muttered Leslie; then turning round, he leaned across the roof to Arthur and said, "Do you know the lady in the heliotrope and black dress?"

"Not in the least," replied the young gentleman; "I never saw her before."

But it was evident now that the strange lady became aware that she had attracted the attention of those upon the coach. She dropped her eyes, whispered something to her companion, and vanished into the crowd.

"Odd," muttered the Colonel. That Lithfield had recognized this lady had not escaped him, and he resolved to ask the Viscount for further particulars when opportunity offered.

What more delightful hour is there in the whole London season than that six to seven on a big match day at Lord's, when the weather is propitious. To sit on bench or coach by a pretty woman, and pretend to be explaining the game to her, a subject in which she affects to be deeply interested whenever an outer barbarian interferes with your *tête-à-tête*, while in reality you neither of you know, much less care, who is in or who is out, these are golden moments in the days of our youth, before anxiety concerning draughts and dampness has come to us, when dyspepsia and liver are evils of which we have vaguely heard. Such a halcyon time has arrived to the Viscount's party. The warm summer's evening would have calmed the fears of the greatest hypochondriac, and as Lithfield and Miss Clothel interchange light badinage on the box, it more than once rose to the Viscount's mind to ask her to accept legal claim to the position; but Lithfield knew women well, and strongly conscious though he was of the rank, wealth, and position that he had to offer,



yet he felt instinctively Ethel was not to be won on that score. That he might ask her hand successfully in days to come, he thought very possible, but he felt that to ask that question now would be very doubtful policy. He had been a dozen times as near the brink of matrimony as this, but lacked the nerve to don the fetters. "For better or worse," snarled the cynic lang syne—terrible sophistry! do we not always take them for worse? Not quite; they do not run about in the highways or byways, but the women who make their husband's career are alive in the world yet; an' you meet one and have the shrewdness to know her when you do, remember she brings ample dowry, though she has few gowns to her back.

Arthur Riversley had speedily swung himself off the drag and plunged into the general crowd, leaving his sister to tyrannize over John Hainton to the summit of her caprice; but Maude was no merciless maiden in this respect, and Hainton was soon gossiping pleasantly enough with the object of his admiration, and much relieved to find that Colonel Leslie interfered but rarely in their conversation, devoting himself, with a perseverance worthy of a better cause, to the entertainment of Miss Mangerston. That young lady had a great liking for the Colonel; he was always gravely courteous and pleasant to her; and let Ethel Clothele be jealous as she might on behalf of her *chere-amie*, yet Ethel's friends, although not slighting, were apt to vouchsafe Miss Mangerston scant converse. Caroline Mangerston had never much to say for herself, and men are wont to tire of executing monologue to women, however unscrupulous they may be as regards their fellows. Yes, there are times when we have all mentally raged to get "our oar in," and nearly choked from suppressed execration at our companion's ceaseless garrulity.

But the horses are round, the stumps are drawn, Cambridge eighty-one for two wickets, and the fashionable world flocks westward again to dinner. When Lord Lithfield pulled up his team in front of the house in Prince's Gate, Ethel bade him a frank good-night, and thanked him honestly for a pleasant afternoon.

"You'll let me call for you to-morrow, then, Miss Clothele, and we'll drive up to see the battle finished."

“With pleasure,” said Ethel, as she swung herself lightly to the ground. “Now, good-bye.”

But the cloud no bigger than a man’s hand was already in the heavens, and the downpour of the morrow effectually squelched the university tournament, and saved the dark blue from what looked like imminent defeat.





## CHAPTER VII.

### AN ILLUSIVE IDEA.

**A**RTHUR RIVERSLEY, as July wore away, was getting a little intoxicated with his social success. To exchange university life for the great London Maelström is alone a thing that often throws a weak character somewhat off its balance; but in Arthur Riversley's case there was this additional temptation—namely, that he who had been a man of little mark at Oxford had, thanks chiefly to his sister's friendship with Miss Clothele, aided a little by the probability of his inheriting George Latimer's money, and eventually coming into the baronetcy, obtained a footing in the London world that men of much greater advantages seldom achieve in their first season. That he should ignore the obvious ladder by which he had climbed was only what might be naturally expected from a weak and somewhat conceited young man. Mr. Arthur Riversley had taught himself to believe that his success was due principally owing to his good looks, agreeable manners, and promising prospects. He had for some time schooled himself into the belief that there was no probability whatever of his cousin Fred ever turning up, and of late had grumbled a good deal at the terms of the late Mr. Latimer's will. To compass such a life as Arthur is now leading requires much clever management on five hundred a year, and already the young man was beginning to find considerable difficulties about

finding the ready money, without which, however much you may live at other people's expense, it is impossible to carry on the war. You may pay nobody that it is at all possible to get credit from—your tradesmen, for instance, such as tailors, hosiers, hatters, &c., are liberal in that way for two or three years—but cabs, club dinners, railway excursions, Ascot, Hurlingham, &c., are matters of “money down,” and by no manner of means to be otherwise compounded.

Arthur Riversley, thinking somewhat gloomily over the scarcity of gold and silver, gradually falls to musing over what is the easiest remedy to apply to this state of things. After much cogitation he comes to the conclusion that there are only two courses open to him—matrimony or the money-lenders. He, as may be easily imagined, over-rates his chances in either line. He considers himself a very much more eligible *parti* than it is likely the chaperones at all events would deem him at present; and most decidedly, when he comes to discourse his prospects with the money-lenders, he will find that they put a very different value upon his chance of inheriting Latimer's estate to that at which he assesses it. However, he is not called upon just yet to try this experiment. He bethinks himself that a wealthy wife would be a more prudent, more moral thing to do than borrowing money at ruinous interest; and, mentally patting himself on the back for the worldly wisdom he has displayed in his cogitation, he begins to run over the monied young ladies of his acquaintance.

As may easily be supposed, Ethel Clothele was one of the first names that came into his mind, and after two or three minutes' reflection he came to the conclusion that it was useless to go further. Here was one of the very handsomest girls in London, an avowed heiress, and mixing in the very best society, an intimate friend of his sister's, and who always welcomed him with the greatest cordiality. Why should he not stand a good chance with her?

“I'm of her own set,” he argued (he forgot but partially, and that but very recently), “heir to a good estate and a baronetcy, of an old county family, and, hem! not a bad looking fellow”—diffidence was not one of Arthur Rivers-

ley's failings. "Of course she might do better, but, by Jove!" here he pulled up his shirt collar and contemplated himself in the glass, "she might do worse. I'm blessed if I don't go down and talk the thing over with Maude. These girls tell each other a good deal; it's possible she might give me an inkling of what chance I should stand."

Having thus proposed to make life easy to himself by living on a woman's money, Mr. Riversley felt that he was as much a man of energy and determination as if he had sat down with the firmest resolution to work hard and endeavour to achieve success in his profession. He really could have seen nothing mean in the step he meditated, even had his attention been thus directed. He would have enumerated all the advantages that he on his side brought to the bargain he proposed; and, remember, he had taught himself to believe that these were no shadowy contingencies, but realities that would come to pass in the next six years, even probably to being direct heir to the baronetcy. Sir John's life was precarious, and that Fred Riversley should ever appear upon the scene, an idea not worth serious consideration.

"It would read rather well in the *Post*—'Ethel Clothele to Arthur Riversley, nephew of Sir John Riversley, of Bunnington Park.' Suppose one could hardly say nephew and heir of Sir John Riversley. Of course I know there is nothing to come into there, but the title's nice, and between my own money and Ethel's we might redeem the property. At all events that is a thing to think over."

You see this young man did not affect to be the least in love with perhaps the most beautiful girl he had ever met. He was really too much wrapped up in himself to run much danger from woman's bright eyes, flash they ever so brightly. He thought that this would be a very excellent arrangement, and that he could get along very comfortably upon Miss Clothele's money till such time as he succeeded to his own inheritance. An acknowledged beauty as his wife, too, would give him a certain *éclat* in society, he thought. He was not old enough as yet to apprehend that the position of Venus' satellite is by no means to be

coveted. No need, at all events, to preach to Arthur Riversley the creed that belief in one's self goes a long way to assuring success.

He turned into Curzon Street, a flower in his button-hole, his frock-coat and lavender gloves buttoned tight, and with the easy air of one of Society's spoilt children—children, alas, who gaze ruefully back, at times, upon cakes prematurely eaten, on toys too soon broken—who, reckless in the morning of life, too often forge fetters for their lifetime. We know all about the opportunity past, the word spoken, and the arrow sped, but who shall enumerate the things that *do* come back? Aye, come back, and persistently come back. The protested bill, the follies of our youth, the sins of our maturer years, &c. We pay penalty sharp enough concerning them in this world without counting the indictment against us hereafter.

He found his family at luncheon, as he anticipated, and was cordially welcomed.

"To what unexpected event do we owe the felicity of your highness's company?" asked Miss Bessie, pertly.

She and Arthur were apt to spar a little in these times. The young lady had no idea of what she termed humouring Arthur's airs. "I don't mind his 'putting on side' with Society," said this irrepressible and, truth to say, somewhat slangy damsel; "that's Society's look-out; but I, for one, don't mean to submit to it at home."

Her brother, his self-esteem being continually severely wounded, was wont to sneer at the folly of taking girls from school before their education was completed—at an age when they mistook pertness for wit and impudence for ease in company. But, for all that, Arthur winced a good deal under Miss Bessie's attacks, proudly though he tried to ignore them. He was not clever, and his two sisters were. It is so at times. The talent of the family lies entirely with the girls, while the boys, whose opportunities of making use of it are so much more extensive, are unluckily destitute of capital to draw upon. Maude strove to think and make the very best of her brother, but Miss Bessie was more merciless, and, if he snubbed her, she most relentlessly chaffed him, and, on the whole, perhaps ~~had~~ had considerably the best of it. Irrepressible young ladies

of her age are very difficult to put down, while conceited young men of Arthur's are terribly sensitive to raillery.

Calmly ignoring Miss Bessie's interrogatory, Arthur slipped quietly into a chair and apparently devoted himself to his luncheon.

"Has he come here simply because he is hungry?" asked Bessie of her sister in a stage aside; "or has he fashionable intelligence to unfold?"

"I have come to lunch, Bessie, if you are curious. If I had fashionable chit-chat to talk over I certainly shouldn't bore you with it," retorted Arthur, sharply. "Stupid, I know, to those who don't understand it."

"Dear me!" ejaculated that young lady, throwing up her hands in mock admiration. "To think he has been bored with it all his life, and still 'bears it like a lamb!'"

Arthur Riversley once more took refuge in silence, but Miss Bessie had no idea of retiring from the attack so speedily.

"I don't mind sacrificing myself," she observed, with assumed solemnity; but, child though I am, I can see you are suffering from a suppressed secret. Best cleanse your breast, my brother, if it is a story not altogether unbecoming my childish ears."

The girl was a born actress, and her pose of resignation and the mock dignity of her language made her sister laugh.

"Just like you, Maude, you always encourage her in her impertinence," growled Arthur.

"If you are so irritable or out of sorts that you cannot put up with a little of Bessie's nonsense, tell her so at once, and I have no doubt she will leave you alone."

"I think I had best leave you both alone," retorted that young lady, and, with a "bless you, my dears," she rose with her father and mother and left the room.

"I came here principally to see you, Maude, on a matter of importance," said Arthur, as the door closed.

"You are not in trouble, I hope," she murmured; for she read his character so truly, and the effect of this shadowy inheritance upon it, that her first impression would be always this when he made such an announcement to her.

"Not at all," he rejoined. "Don't you think an early marriage is a good thing for a fellow? It steadies him and gives him position, you know."

"Those are two points that depend a good deal upon whom a man marries. If he marries a good girl that he is honestly in love with, it should steady him if anything in this world will. As for position—well, of course it is possible to arrive at that through your wife; but, Arthur,—our sex see these things quicker than yours—take my word for it, there is not one in twenty of us who could forego at times reminding a husband of that fact; and, unless you, by your own exertions, eventually give something in return, you'll not find it a happy marriage."

"Pooh! Why, the thing is done every day."

"Exactly; and the mistake discovered every day. Many a man, whose name is now famous, has doubtless owed his start in life to his wife's wealth and position, and such marriage has turned out happily, but then, remember, the man made a name for himself afterwards."

"Well, you know, I didn't exactly want so much to elucidate your views on matrimony generally as upon one particular case."

"Meaning your own projected scheme. But, Arthur, how do you propose to keep a wife?"

"That's nothing to the purpose. I want to consult you about what prospect of success I should have with a certain lady."

"My dear Arthur, before I even ask who the lady is, it is but fair to tell you that I fancy Society would dub you a detrimental."

"You forget my prospects!" exclaimed the young man, hastily. "The woman who marries me will, in course of time, be Lady Riversley, and sharer in a handsome income."

"I'll argue no more with you about those 'will-o'-the-wisp' prospects, but you'll find the world generally appraise them pretty much at my valuation."

"Absurd, Maude! I cannot understand the extreme delight you have in running your own brother down."

"I do not," said the girl, sadly; "but I would fain have him stick to his bone instead of snapping at the shadow."



Better to work at the profession you have embraced than to keep speculating upon an inheritance that may never come to you."

He recognized the soundness of the advice. He had quite enough common sense to know that was what it beloved him to, but he was of an indolent, sensuous temperament, that shrank from toil and dearly loved pleasure. It was sweeter to remain wrapped in the pleasant dream he had wove for himself. He could, of course, always take to hard work when the necessity became apparent. He did not know what that meant—how hard the collar presses when, after years of sybarite existence, work becomes a *must*, if you are to live, and hard work if you are to live decently. He did not consider that the first rungs of the ladder are poorly paid in all professions, and in none more than the very one he had adopted. He had never seriously thought about that famous essay of Dickens' on the "dry rot" in humanity—so awfully true to nature—a common complaint, so easy to contract, and only to be stemmed by bitter toil and terrible anguish of both mind and body. He had no more thought now of attending to Maude's advice, than if he had not believed in it. We believe in a good many things that we totally disregard; and there is no greater mistake than to suppose that men, as a rule, go hopelessly down hill with closed eyes. They see their doom quite as clearly as the lookers on; but strength of mind to stop the coach fails them.

"Never mind what I had better do, or what I had better not speculate on," returned Arthur, after a pause. "The question now is, what chance have I in what I propose doing? Why I come to you is, because I think you may probably be able to form a good opinion of my chance. I told you I thought of marrying. What if I should ask Ethel Clothele?"

"You! I beg your pardon, Arthur, I don't hesitate to say I think you would get a decided though courteous refusal."

"I am sure I get on very well with her; we are on excellent terms," rejoined Arthur, somewhat sulkily. "I can't see that she has a decided preference for any one else."

"No ; but you surely cannot say she's ever shown a decided preference for you. Don't you think your being my brother may account, in some measure, for her being always civil to, and sometimes dancing with you ?"

"It strikes me you're a little jealous of the heiress' affections," said Arthur, drily.

"It is but natural," continued Maude, ignoring his remark, "that she should welcome the brother of one of her chief intimates cordially, and vouchsafe him a dance at times, especially when he dances as well as you do ; but, believe me, you have made no further impression, nor do I think you likely to. I don't pretend to pity you, for you have never even made a pretence of being in love with her. If Ethel wishes to marry position, in my humble opinion, she might be Lady Lithfield for the holding up of her finger—a position which, granting that visionary bequest should become a fact, is higher than you could then give her."

"Hang it, Maude, I never knew that Lithfield had made play in that quarter," interposed Arthur, with a look of much surprise.

"I'd hardly say that," returned his sister. "Lord Lithfield is a man of the world, and not likely to go beyond a certain length without encouragement he has never as yet received. *He* does not view winning Ethel Clothele as quite such a prosaic or easy task as yourself. To do him justice, too, he is really much struck with her, and if she chose it should be so, would, I fancy, be very soon much in love with her. He's twenty years your senior, Arthur, but I verily believe, has still more capacity than you for that amiable indiscretion."

"Of course, if Lithfield is in the field, it is no use my entering against *him*," observed Arthur, who thought this a favourable excuse for abandoning the discussion.

"And, if he were not," exclaimed Maude, somewhat nettled at her brother's conceit, "there are twenty as good as he she might pick and choose from. Mark me, my brother, Ethel Clothele will marry because she loves, and for neither rank nor position. It is not that she has ever told me so, but we women can read each other much better than you men, and I know it will be so. If you can

ever make her love you, she will marry you, but you'll have to love her first. She would laugh at such protestations as you would make her now. I don't think I am ever likely to call her sister-in-law, and in all honesty, putting on one side her fortune, I say, Arthur, she's too good for you," and, with a little nod, Maude left the room.

"She is right," mused Arthur Riversley, as he sought his hat; "these women do know each other better than we know them. If she pronounces it no go, I suppose it is. Lithfield, of course, is a trump against one it was impossible to count on. Ethel marry for love! no, not if the coronet is really at her choice. I know that much of the sex, anyhow."

Maude would have had considerably more trouble to convince her brother his chance with the heiress was hopeless, had she not depicted Lord Lithfield at her feet; but under those circumstances he was fain to admit that solution of his difficulties was not open to him. It was not that creditors were pressing him in the least, as yet. It was simply that he had discovered his income was insufficient for his requirements, *ergo*, the income must be increased. The reduction of the requirements never entered his head. Somehow, it seldom does in such cases.





## CHAPTER VIII.

MRS. BEECHER.

**T**HERE is a part of London, lying between Lord's Cricket Ground and the Paddington Station, which might be at present described as "the debatable land." Respectability of the heaviest type, Bohemianism, and the *demi monde*, all seem at present to be striving for its possession, and it will be curious to see, in twenty years, whether this is the district of the retired tradesman, or of the artists and their followers. The third section, like the North American Indian, always retires before the flood of respectability—intolerant of nomade habits and irregular hours. The Bohemians are also vagabond in their habits, rising when they list, going to bed any time, smoking at all hours, and seeing nothing peculiar in drinks under any circumstances, whether with the lark or the owl, taken horizontally or up-standing, before breakfast or after supper.

At the upper part, or, to speak more specifically, at the Hyde Park end of Maida Vale, are several pretty villas, standing in what, for London, are spacious gardens. One of the prettiest of these cottages in the debatable land was inhabited by a rather debatable widow. The social police of the neighbourhood, consisting of those acidulated spinsters, fussy matrons, and inquisitive elderly gentlemen, whose main employment in life is inquiring into their neighbours' affairs in the first place, and the tearing to

pieces of their neighbours' characters in the second, were much exercised in their minds concerning her. Mrs. Beecher was a very well preserved woman, who might be any age between thirty-five and forty-five. She dressed extremely well—too well, said the social police—though in excellent taste. She was very fairly regular in her attendance at church, very fairly liberal in her subscriptions to the schools, &c. She had a good many visitors, all looking good style and irreproachably apparelled.

They always called at strictly canonical hours. There were no reasonable grounds whatever for assuming the slightest doubt about Mrs. Beecher's thorough respectability. She had resided in her present house for the last four years, had paid her bills regularly, and never even afforded a surmise for scandal about herself; but, as I said before, the self-constituted "Vigilance Committee" of the district were still restless and curious concerning her.

She made no disguise of her antecedents. She was the widow of Edward Beecher, Esq., late of the Bengal Civil Service, had a pension from the Indian Government in virtue of her deceased husband, and private means of her own to boot. She kept a couple of horses, a groom, and a very neat Victoria—rode sometimes, attended by this groom, an elderly servant of most orthodox appearance—was sometimes driven by him. She kept, altogether, four servants—a cook, a parlourmaid, a housemaid, and the above-mentioned groom. The first and last mentioned had been with their mistress for years, but were remarkable for the reticence of their speech. The others had been but lately engaged; they equally made no disclosures, for the very sufficient reason that they knew nothing to disclose. Mrs. Beecher remained an unfathomable mystery. She neither sought society nor positively declined it; but, of the two, inclined towards the latter. Old Colonel MacGruden, indeed, vowed that, to the best of his belief, Tom Beecher never was married, but he was bound to confess that Beecher had died four years ago, and that he had known nothing of him during the last six or seven years of his life. So, in such society as she chose to mix in, Mrs. Beecher moved under some slight amount

of suspicion. She afforded no grounds for it whatever. She was quiet, pleasant in manner, and decorous in behaviour, and, but for one thing, even the suspicions of the social police of the district must have been long laid. The one thing they could not quite get over was the numerous fashionable visitors from the West that Mrs. Beecher had. Delicate cross-examination of the widow on that point elicited nothing more than she had moved much in society in her earlier life, and that her old friends were kind enough not to forget her now she was an old woman.

"Old woman! my dear," said Mrs. Pickinham, to her bosom friend, Miss Snipinchase, "that's her hypocrisy; much she dresses—and I'll admit that she knows how to dress—as if she thought herself an old woman."

"Yes," replied the fair Snipinchase, "and as for her *old* friends, why, there were two *young* gentlemen called on her last Sunday afternoon, who might have been her sons."

Still, despite all this, Mrs. Beecher apparently mixed in as much society in her neighbourhood as she cared about, and it might have occurred to a shrewd observer, that she coveted no more than threw a thorough *ægis* of respectability over her. Three or four times a week, in the season, her brougham would rattle into town, but as to what diversion, or as to where his mistress might have been, the old groom was dumb. Theatre, opera, dinner, was all that could be extorted from him. Which opera-house, which theatre, or where was the dinner, were subjects upon which he was not to be questioned with result. But, if there was one thing that mystified the social police more than another, it was this: they penetrated—that is, the female and larger part of that great protection society—Mrs. Beecher's "make up." It was evident to them that the ravages of time were, in some measure, repaired by art—consummate art they admitted, but for what purpose? When a woman is coquette enough to carefully conceal her years in this wise, she invariably still wishes to attract admiration, at all events. Would not any jury of women find that verdict unanimously? In such society as they saw Mrs. Beecher in, she most decidedly did not seek to do so. She was quiet, natural, sensible, goodnatured, but not a shadow of coquetting was to be detected in her

manner. She never offered the faintest encouragement to flirtation, and when under strict notice of the inquisitors compliments had been paid her, acknowledged them gracefully as such, and nothing more.

It is a glorious July night as Mrs. Beecher's brougham turns quietly, if quickly, up the little bit of a drive leading up to the cottage. Her servant descends, rings the bell, and the old cook shortly appears. This much the gossips of the vicinity have collected from the housemaids, that it is old Catherine who always sits up to let in her mistress at night; but that is plausibly explained by the remark that their work does or should begin earlier than the cook's.

"Any letters, Catherine?" inquired her mistress, as the door closed.

"Two or three, that don't look of any consequence; but of course I don't know, madam. I have laid the table, and placed some cold chicken and tongue, in the dining-room. Shall I bring up a pint of champagne, or what?"

"Seltzer and a little brandy, and put the cigarettes out. I want to smoke more than eat. The letters, too, I suppose they are there—not of much consequence, I dare say, but I'll look them over after supper."

A handsome woman as she sat at her supper undoubtedly was Mrs. Beecher—a dark-haired florid brunette on a large scale. She was attired in an evening robe of sapphire velvet, with appointments all duly to match, and no man but would have pronounced her inside the forties who might have gazed on her then for the first time. Her eyes flashed brilliantly, and the blood mantled red in the widow's cheeks as she mused over the pleasant evening she had spent; and it was not till she had lit a somewhat large-sized cigarette, that she thought of the two or three letters that laid upon the table. She opened the first carelessly, glanced at it, and tossed it contemptuously on one side. "Go with that party to Richmond? No, not now-adays; and I shall give you to understand, Viscount, I consider it an impertinence to ask me. You might make allowances for a woman who has at last got the best of Fortune to some extent, although I know you would never turn Queen's evidence against me. Queer hand this. I wonder who my correspondent is. How gloriously Patti

did sing to-night, to be sure! Music and cigarettes! On my word, if one could but smoke at the opera, and men were not allowed to babble except between the acts, it would be Elysium!" She read the next letter—the cigarette fell from her fingers unheeded, and she became lost in thought. She read it over thrice, and then muttered, "What can this mean? Is it for good or for evil? And, my God, how I did love this man once! Can he be alive yet? I've deemed him dead for years past."

She rose, and paced the room some half-dozen times, lost in thought, then once more glanced at the letter—

"If I mistake not," it ran, "you at one time took an interest in Captain Frederick Riversley. Are you aware that he has been left a fine property? If report says true, you did a good bit for him in the days of his adversity. He is now thoroughly in a position to repay your kindness, or any moneys you may have been induced to advance him. I recommend you to see him as soon as possible, as he is of that kind who are, somehow, speedily bereft of their inheritance. The pigeon that believes in its own beak and claws falls an easy and speedy prey to the hawks of its neighbourhood. You cannot save him—take care of yourself.                      "Your well-wisher,                      R. T."

Mrs. Beecher mused a good bit upon the letter. That she had known Fred Riversley towards the finish of his career in the Guards was true, as also was the fact that she had been passionately attached to him. She was considerably older than Fred Riversley could be, but that, again, is no great criterion—ladies often lose their hearts to men ten years their junior. The matron of forty with a passion for a young gentleman of three or four and twenty, is no anomaly, and she is wont to display, perhaps, even less discretion in her philandering than her more youthful compeers. Mrs. Beecher had wanted many years of forty when she had known Fred Riversley. Who was her unknown correspondent? What was his object in giving her this information? The widow had lived rather too *rusé* and adventurous a life to believe such a bit of information would be sent her unless the writer, at all events, believed it true. He had evidently accurate



knowledge of her past relations with Fred Riversley. Now what could be his object? For that of course he was, in some measure, serving his own purposes, Marion Beecher felt no doubt. She was conscious of having a strong claim upon Frederick Riversley; and though she appeared, and was, comfortably off, yet she was a woman of extravagant tastes, who, like most of us, could do with a little addition to her income. She made up her mind to make inquiries quietly. The advertisement in the papers had never caught her eye, and her anonymous correspondent's letter told the first she had heard of it.

She turned the affair over in her mind for nearly an hour before she had taken her resolve. She must see Fred Riversley. She felt a tenderness for him even now, though the wild love she had once felt for him was a thing of the past. Broken, ruined as he had been, he had behaved well to her to the last. He had made no disguise of the utter wreck of his fortunes. Their parting had been inevitable, but they had parted good friends. She must see him, if it was only to congratulate him, to welcome him home. As to anything else, well, she would be guided by circumstances. She did not want to harass him for money; still, if he was really now a rich man, she thought he was bound to do something for her if she required it. A very hazy idea concerning this something, but a vivid impression that want of money often necessitated the postponement of her desires.

"Yes," she muttered, as she brushed out her dusky tresses, which exhibited no grey hairs, albeit there could be little doubt to a close observer that, when in battle array, the widow had recourse to the accessories of the toilet. "I must see him first, and then find out his address. He could surely never refuse to visit me if I wrote him a note—indeed, he ought to find me out. My name is in the Blue Book, and an old Londoner like Fred might speedily discover me if he tried; perhaps not though, I have changed my name since he left. However, if he is back, and has come into money, it will be easy to come across him in the Park, at the opera, or some such place, unless he is vastly changed from the Fred Riversley I knew."

Having arrived at which conclusion, Marion Beecher sought her pillow, and slept tranquilly till morning.

When a woman makes up her mind to do a thing, and that woman happens to be an independent lady, she generally loses very little time about compassing her end. Not the sort of person, the widow, to let the grass grow under her feet on such occasion. Two or three of her intimates were speedily informed of her wish to see Captain Riversley.

"Nothing easier," replied one of her cavaliers. "I will point him out to you any time. He is always about ; but he calls himself *Mr. Riversley*."

Mrs. Beecher knew very well that army men, on retirement from the service, did sometimes drop their rank, especially when they had not got very high in the profession.

"I mean the *Mr. Riversley*," she replied, "who I hear has come into a good property somewhat unexpectedly."

"Exactly—he's to be seen everywhere. The next time I have the honour of being your escort, I will point him out to you. We shall probably come across him at anything that collects the London world. I only know him by sight, but he goes everywhere."

"Not in your set exactly, I presume ?"

"No ; he is a satellite of Miss Clothele, and revolves round that particular planet ; but I don't know any of that circle, and am not, I think, likely to do so."

"I wish you knew *Mr. Riversley*," rejoined Mrs. Beecher, musingly.

"Your wishes are commands, and, if I get the chance, I won't fail to make his acquaintance ; but as I tell you, to put it in the vernacular, I'm not in with that lot."

The widow's cavaliers were of the fast school in some measure ; not but what she sometimes appeared under the escort of as well-bred middle-aged men as could be met with. From this out Mrs. Beecher made inquiry in society concerning the heritage of Captain Riversley, but by this time the story of George Latimer's will was a twelvemonth old, and had died out pretty well except in the immediate set to which in his lifetime he had been affiliated. Arthur Riversley was generally regarded as his heir, with some

hazy idea that he would not come into the property for some two or three years ; and Arthur found it very pleasant to accept the situation, and had really brought himself to consider it a hardship that there were close upon six years of probation still to intervene. The reappearance of his cousin was a thing which now rarely recurred to him.

“Poor Fred is not in this world, or we should have heard of him long before this,” he would remark languidly upon such sparse occasions as those conversant with the real state of the case alluded to that possibility.

That people imperfectly acquainted with the real facts in the outset should be quite in the dark about them now, was but natural. It is small matter of astonishment that Arthur Riversley should have been pointed out to Mrs. Beecher at the university match as George Latimer’s heir ; for the richly-dressed lady who honoured Lord Lithfield’s drag with such a steady and comprehensive stare that afternoon was the fair widow to whom I have just introduced you.

“Nothing to me,” thought the widow after that little bit of sight-seeing—“a relation of Fred’s, I dare say ; but I don’t think it likely Fred’s relations would look kindly on me under any circumstances, much less feel called upon to afford me assistance, even if I required it, which, thank Heaven, I don’t. No ; my anonymous friend has got hold of an incorrect version of the story. He’s right, though, upon one point. Arthur Riversley has a good-looking face, but, if I know anything of such matters, it is a monstrous weak one—likely to fall a victim to the free lances, I should fancy.”





## CHAPTER IX.

### “THE PARK” BEFORE GOODWOOD.

**T**HE Saturday before Goodwood! What society, that is the very cream of society, looks upon as the last “park” of the season. “Of course some of these poor parliamentary devils may be tied by the leg here for another two or three weeks,” remarks Lord Lithfield to his friend Ralph Leslie; “but their feminine belongings won’t stand it, they’ll be off either to the horrible dulness of their rural retreats, or to the execrable houses they have hired on the sea.”

“And where,” laughed the Colonel, “do you mean to betake your noble self?”

“It is difficult, without you go grouching, to say. The country, unless there is something to shoot, is simply detestable till hunting begins. Yachting is a bore, except in one of your own. Your confounded host never will leave a place you do not like, nor stay in one you do. You have put a question, Leslie, to which, when you cannot respond ‘Scotland,’ the answer becomes difficult. However, I am off this afternoon, and perhaps Brighton may produce an inspiration.”

“Going to Brighton to-day?” ejaculated Leslie.

“Even so, Ralph. Three other wearied spirits and myself have taken a house there for the month. We shall do the Sussex fortnight as regards racing, win we hope pots of money, take in tons of ozone, get London well out

of us, and be, we trust, richer, wiser, brighter, healthier men on the 1st September; possibly we may not, you know, but that's the design. Deuced odd, I had a line from Prossiter this morning, to say there was a Fred Riversley in the field: 'Reads plausible, but so have some of the others,' those are his words. Astonishing the lot of reprobates about Europe who think they can make something out of that advertisement."

"But Prossiter is quite equal to the occasion, is he not?"

"Quite. I declare I don't think he ever had a case that so interested him. He admits he never felt so keen about anything before. You see he never had anything of this kind to manage previously. It's out of his usual groove, and no Indian questing for a trail, or detective at fault for a clue, could be more athirst to get on the line. Like most of the responses, this I presume. 'Fred Riversley' always replies from a third-rate continental town, and requires twenty-five to fifty pounds to enable him to return to England and take possession of his inheritance."

"Odd thing your going off to-day. How was it you didn't stay till morning?"

"Well, that's Frank Vane's fad; he always vows that the misery of an English Sunday is expiation for a week's average wickedness, but that fifty Sundays in London should expunge every crime in the decalogue from one's register. We don't make it pleasant for the toilers on their one day of rest, it must be confessed: words of wrath hurled at them from the pulpit or liquors of venom launched at them from the bar, with every rational amusement carefully closed against them. Take your choice of strong alcohol or strong doctrine. It will not come in our day, but I prophesy the Established Church will come down with a crash great as the Roman Catholic Church toppled over with in Henry the Eighth's time."

"And the people will be what?" inquired Leslie, smiling: he was used to the Viscount's tirades.

"Heaven knows! Atheists, Deists, or Roman Catholics—extremes are always now meeting in religion. From believing in nothing, to believing with all the trust of a

child, is but a step, and which creed will become dominant, the wildest matter of conjecture. But depend upon it, that from reverence of the goddess of reason, to adoration of the Virgin, is the bridging of a very small stream."

"And we arrive at all this, because a *blasé* reprobate like Frank Vane detests London on Sundays."

"Ah, yes," laughed Lithfield, "and why not? What brought about the Reformation? Henry the Eighth was bored—he really couldn't stand Queen Katherine and her clergymen any longer. Mary of Scotland eventually lost first her liberty, and then her head, because she could not endure John Knox's prosing—denunciations he and his fellows called it—we do name things differently. Who is it mentions 'a pious and painful preacher?' Baxter, is it not? I fancy Knox was a little in that way. Ha! here comes Miss Clothele, and her shadows, Miss Riversley and Miss Mangerston. The first two are about the nicest girls in all London."

"Not about—they *are*," rejoined Leslie, dryly.

"I tell you what, Ralph, I never thought about marrying before, but I've a big mind to see if I could induce Ethel Clothele to be Lady Lithfield. There ought to be somebody to come after me, sprung from my own loins. I shall make an uncomfortable end of it if I think that beast of a cousin of mine is to inherit."

"You could hardly do better," replied Leslie, gravely, though his lips twitched a little under the heavy moustache as he spoke, "and you can offer her a good deal."

The Viscount looked at him curiously for a minute, and then said—

"You don't understand much about women, Ralph, if you think she's that sort. Just consider the case. Miss Clothele has got as much money as she wants; she has the *entrée* to the best of society; and I don't believe she would give eighteen-pence to be a Viscountess, especially hampered by the condition of taking a husband she didn't like, to obtain that rank. My dear fellow, I've been making love to women of some sort ever since I was at Eton, and went through the regulation flirtation with my mother's lady's-maid. I claim to know *a little* about them; and any man who pretends to more must be either very

young or very vain, and will be probably convinced of his mistake very shortly. Remember I have been flirting and spooning all these years you have been laudably engaged in throat-cutting. If I thought she would take into consideration what I can offer her, I'd ask her this morning, if possible; but, my dear Ralph, I am *pas si bête*—that would count little with her."

"Well, you will ask her some day," muttered Leslie, "sooner or later; and no doubt she will say you aye."

"I think she will, if ever I ask her," said Lithfield, quietly.

"You've confidence in the advantages you possess, affect not to count upon them though you may."

"Not a bit," returned the Viscount. "If ever I do ask, I shall feel pretty sure. Ethel Clothele is far too proud to coquette, and a man must be blind to ask an utterly needless question in her case. One might certainly be mistaken, but I don't think I should. Come along, let us go and join them."

"Delighted to see you, Lord Lithfield!" exclaimed Maude, as they shook hands. "My last chance of thanking you for some very pleasant drives."

"Nonsense! I shall see you all on the lawn at Goodwood. Is it not so, Miss Clothele?"

"You will see me—I am staying with the Donaldsons; but Maude, I am afraid, is going back to the west."

"Yes, that is the case," exclaimed Miss Riversley; "and, while admitting I should have dearly liked to go to Goodwood, I must own I never had a pleasanter time in town than the last two months. However, Clumbershire will be very nice. There's solace in lawn tennis and peaches; and we dance down there in a way you Londoners know nothing about."

Lithfield smiled. Maude was a favourite of his, or he would have rejoined languidly, "I can easily imagine so;" but he not only liked the girl herself, but knew her to be the bosom friend of the maiden he delighted to honour. The Viscount had the reputation of being able to say the wickedest things in the most dulcet tones, and with the most utterly unconscious manner of any man in London. He was a good-natured cynic, though, and was

rarely malicious except under provocation. His sense of fun sometimes overpowered him and caused a retort to escape him that he would hardly have ventured on except for that. A more kindly giber did not exist, and he was wont to rail at affairs generally in preference to making satirical observations on individuals.

"And so you have thoroughly enjoyed your season, Miss Riversley," remarked Leslie.

"Yes, thoroughly. It is the first time I ever had what I should call a good gulp of a London season; hitherto I have only had sips. And you?"

"Well, it has been pleasant in its way, but a little of this sort of life goes a long way with men like myself. It is apt to become a trifle tame. You see, my life has been spent in real soldiering. I have had my turn at big fights with both wild men and wild animals, and on that north-west frontier we are rarely long without a shindy of some sort. We live, so to speak, with foot in stirrup and a hand on the sabre. Big cities to us represent a few weeks' wild intoxication. The older you grow the sooner it palls, and the quicker you thirst for the old wandering tent-life you are accustomed to."

"But you cannot contemplate ending your days in such fashion?" inquired Maude.

"No," rejoined Leslie, laughing. "What I should call the devil is worked out of a man sooner or later, and he is quite content to subside then. It comes to some at forty, while others at eighty would fain take yet again to the war-path an' the authorities would consent. In our country we are wont to wax shy of the Nestors—miserable rule of thumb country that it is. In Germany their leaders are mostly from three score to three score and ten."

"Ah, you have betrayed yourself, Colonel Leslie!" cried Maude, gaily. "It is evident you contemplate pursuing the war-path till your course be run."

"Not quite," rejoined Ralph, smiling. "I have visions of cozy chambers in St. James's, and a brougham, before I die."

"Say a house and a wife. Do you not think it would be better when you are tired of your present wild life?"

"No," replied the Colonel, slowly. "I doubt whether a



score of years' campaigning makes one a domestic character. And you, Miss Mangerston, are you glad the season's come to an end?"

"I don't care much about it one way or the other. I am usually content in London, and I like the country for a bit."

"You go to Goodwood, I presume?"

"No, I am not included in Ethel's invitation," rejoined Miss Mangerston, with a decided dash of vinegar—best Chili—in her voice.

She cared nothing about Goodwood. She took into no consideration that entertainers at the Ducal meeting had to exercise much contrivance about the billeting of their friends, but she simply resented the idea of being, what she would have termed, "left out."

Leslie detected the jar in her voice, and turning quietly to Ethel, said—

"I suppose you also are leaving London?"

"Yes, after Goodwood we go to Scarborough—a very pleasant watering-place—pleasantest of them all I think—for the next few weeks. Do you know it?"

"Very well. I have felt the pangs of *ennui* at every watering-place in the kingdom in my time, and I quite endorse your opinion—Scarborough is about the most endurable of the lot. There's a good deal more 'go' about it than Brighton, in which a cynic of my acquaintance vows you must be either devout or dissolute—saint or sinner. And after Scarborough?"

"We go a round of visits in Clumbershire. I was there last year, you know."

"And so I shall not see you again after Goodwood until the end of——"

"November," interrupted Ethel, laughing. "So you must bear that infinite sorrow with manly fortitude and as you best may."

"You should not laugh. Really, Miss Clothele, losing sight of you will be to lose sight of a good deal of life's sun—there!"

"Very pretty, Viscount, but compliments between such allies as you and me are hardly the thing at parting."

"I hate parting with my friends, and really I was beginning to look upon you as something more."

"What, a daily necessity—an irritant that you had accustomed yourself to, and felt that you could ill bear to be bereft of? Now, don't look angry," continued Miss Clothele, smiling. "I know what you mean perfectly, and am quite willing to admit that you are not only a friend in the ordinary acceptance of the term, but a valued and intimate one to boot."

"Then you can give me credit for genuine regrets at having to say adieu."

"I should be very much disappointed if you had not. It would be small compliment to our friendship if our separation were not tinged with sadness. But, in these days, Viscount, when, in our country, separation merely signifies a matter of twelve or fourteen hours, real sentiment is not possible on the subject."

"Quite possible," rejoined Lithfield, "but it depends altogether on 'the subject.' Miss Clothele will, maybe, discover that I am right in days to come."

"Well parried," replied Ethel, laughing. "And now, wishing you may come and recount to me tales of great racing successes in Suffolk, good-bye. Maude and I go out of the Grosvenor Gate, as she has promised to lunch me to-day."

Lord Lithfield shook hands with the ladies, and, as he strolled out of the park with Leslie, observed grimly—

"There is no fear of my being said nay at present, Ralph."

"What! You don't mean you have put your fortune to the test this morning, surely?" ejaculated the Colonel, sharply.

"No, and am not likely to, so far as I can judge, old man. I have too clear an apprehension of what the verdict would be just now to risk it."

Although he had no thought of putting his own chances to the test, yet Ralph Leslie derived comfort from the apparent discomfiture of Ethel's most formidable admirer.

As for the Viscount, his interest in life was re-aroused by finding on his writing-table a visiting-ticket engraved—

"Captain Frederick Riversley."

“Poor Fred at last,” muttered the Viscount. “I wish I wasn’t leaving town. However, I shall be back again in a fortnight, and I can write to Prossiter. I wonder what Fred Riversley’s like now. These castaways come back to us wiser, but not, as a rule, such good fellows as they were when first wrecked on life’s waters.”





## CHAPTER X.

CAPTAIN RIVERSLEY.

**M**R. PROSSITER is sitting in his room, in Lincoln's Inn Fields, drafting one of those complicated marriage settlements, for which the firm was so famous, and which not only feathered, and fresh feathered, the tolerably warm nest of Prossiter and Chudkins, but entailed a profitable business on their posterity, even to the second and third generation.

Suddenly was hissed up the whispering pipe : " Gentleman to see you, sir—name, Captain Frederick Riversley."

" Will see him in ten minutes," murmured Mr. Prossiter back again ; and then threw himself back into his chair, to meditate upon whether this was the real Frederick Riversley.

It didn't signify what Prossiter and Chudkins might be really engaged in—they might be yawning, spiking flies with a pen-knife, munching dry biscuit over pernicious sherry or grand old port, or picking their teeth from very weariness ; but they never saw a client under ten minutes. It was a tradition of their office—it is, indeed, of most—whether to give the idea of excessive business or not I can't say. Similarly, it is a tradition amongst clerks, to invariably hand you the supplement of the *Times*. Why does one never, by accident, get half of the actual paper ? Can they take in the supplement only, at a reduced rate, or do the clerks retain the body of the journal for their

own private reading? Personally, for half-an-hour, I consider the supplement of the *Times* infinitely more amusing than the paper itself. Such an extraordinary catalogue of wants, whims, wickedness, and eccentricity, you shall see nowhere else.

"Now," mused Mr. Prossiter, "what are the chances about this being really Frederick Riversley? I have had a good many applications from continental towns, all of the same kind—all requesting an advance of money to enable them to come to England. This is the first man that has come and said, 'I am Frederick Riversley.' The presumption is that this really is the man. He would scarcely dare face our office, unless a most foolish and ignorant impostor; knowing, as he must, that means the submitting to a crucial examination of his identity. He must be aware that we have accurate information about all sorts of details of Captain Riversley's life that, unless he can respond satisfactorily to, makes exposure only a matter of a day or two. He must know that he will be called upon to confront many of his old friends, and it is probable, unless the man is an idiot, he is not without knowledge that there are penalties attached to 'the obtaining of money under false pretences.' No," concluded Mr. Prossiter, tapping his teeth thoughtfully, with his gold eye-glasses, "the balance of probability is in favour of the candidate being genuine. I may as well, by the way, have my note-book concerning the case, and a few leading documents concerning it—and, ah, yes, a cheque-book—whether the real man or an impostor, he will, no doubt, equally want money at once."

Mr. Prossiter crossed the room, opened a drawer, from which he took a red morocco note-book, several papers, and a blank cheque-book. He was about to close it, when he suddenly exclaimed, "What a fool I am! I forgot the photographs." He looked through the drawer for a moment, and then took from it a large envelope. He walked back to his table, arranged the papers carefully on his right hand, placed the morocco book on his left, and drew some loose papers carelessly over the cheque-book; then he opened the envelope and gazed attentively at the four or five *cartes de visite* it contained. "No great guide these,"

he muttered—"three distinct likenesses, and the man, be he ever so genuine, probably not resembling any one of them very much. No; one don't always recognize a photograph even of a few weeks ago, and when one knows the person who sat for it. No conclusive evidence, should he fail to correspond to these."

"Show Captain Riversley up," he hissed down through the tube.

A few minutes, and a slight, dark man, of middle height, clad in an ordinary suit of dittoes, entered the room, raised his low-crowned hat easily, and observed quietly, "Mr. Prossiter, I presume?"

"How do you do, Captain Riversley?" said the lawyer, rising to meet his client, and extending his hand. "Pray be seated, sir. There is a great deal to be said between us, even at this our first interview, and, I need scarcely say, we shall have to trouble you several times before our business is satisfactorily concluded. Satisfactory, very, I trust for you, Captain Riversley; at least, coming into a handsome property is usually so deemed by the fortunate inheritor."

Fred Riversley threw himself wearily back in his chair. "Yes," he rejoined, slowly, "when you have lived on the rocks, with the goats, for years, it is a pleasant change to find yourself once more amongst the sheep, and knee-deep in clover."

"A gentleman this man, and no fool," thought the lawyer. He was in no way convinced that this really was Frederick Riversley; "but," he argued, "the easiest way to arrive at the truth will be to affect no manner of doubt in the first instance. If he is the right man, we are likely to keep his business by cordially acknowledging him as such from the first: if he is an impostor, nothing is so likely to throw him off his guard as a belief that we entertain no doubt concerning him."

"And now, Captain Riversley, you would naturally like some particulars concerning your inheritance."

The new comer nodded.

"You will excuse my asking you, in the first place, how it is you have been so long in responding to our advertisement?"

"Yes; because it's part of your legal caution, I suppose."

"Just so; you'll pardon me, I know, but men are usually more prompt to claim a hundred pound legacy than you have shown yourself with regard to a handsome property."

"The wolf may be slow to clench his fangs in the lamb," rejoined the other, dryly, "simply because he don't happen to know of the lamb's whereabouts. I have lived with the wolves of late. We don't get either our tea, toast, or papers, very regularly in that country."

"Then you don't know in the least who has left you this inheritance, or what it amounts to?"

"How should I? When I drifted into the 'broken brigade' there was not one of my kith likely to leave me enough to bury me. If you know anything about us, you know Bunnington must come to the hammer, whenever Sir John, my father, dies. You talk about a handsome property. What is it? five hundred a year? and who the devil left it me?"

"It is a good deal better than five hundred a year," returned Mr. Prossiter, tapping his teeth. "Not much like his photograph, and looks half-a-dozen years older than he should do; but hard times may account for that," mused the lawyer, "and he makes no disguise that his bed has not been of rose-leaves these latter years."

"Ah, you don't even suspect who left it you?"

"No!"

"Did you ever hear of George Latimer?"

"Of course; I knew him well—he was a great racing man; but if you mean he's left me anything, I can only say I am much amazed."

"Hem!" said Mr. Prossiter, as he wrote a line in his red morocco book. "You'll excuse me, Captain Riversley, but I must make a note or two of the case."

"I suppose so; you've of course got to satisfy yourself, and probably other people, that I am Captain Riversley. This inheritance, you say, is bigger than I thought. It is likely, under those circumstances, there are several who deem their claims as good as mine, morally, and will take care to see there is no legal error about my succession. Go on."

"Can you tell me where you were born? where you

were baptized? It does not follow, of course, that you should be able to answer these questions; but it will facilitate matters if you can."

"Certainly. I was born at Bunnington Park, and christened, to the best of my belief, in the church of the parish."

"In the year?" inquired Mr. Prossiter, carelessly dipping his pen into the ink.

"Of Grace," drawled Captain Riversley.

"Just so. What year?"

"I don't quite recollect. You see, my memory, good as it is, becomes rather vague about the times of my long clothes."

"And your mother's name was—I think you said?"

"No, you don't. I've said nothing whatever about my mother. If you would prefer to interview a solicitor in my behalf, say so; but I am not going to submit to private cross-examination, for Mr. Prossiter's or any other attorney's amusement. I don't anticipate much difficulty about proving my identity. The particulars of the property I am entitled to, you will be speedily bound to disclose."

"Captain Riversley, you must pardon me. I am sure you will, when I inform you that I have received several intimations from all sorts of places on the continent, in reply to our advertisements. The Captain Riversleys prepared to cross the Channel and prove their identity on the receipt of twenty-five or fifty pounds, that I have heard from, would astonish you."

The ex-guardsman now indulged in a low laugh, and then replied,—

"Yes, I know all that sort well. I have not lived the rascally life of an adventurer in French country towns for nothing. There are plenty of them would think twenty pounds and a new suit of clothes quite sufficient to cross the Channel for. And me—you judge me of that sort! Perhaps you are right; but I have crossed to play genuine cards. If you do not accept me, I must seek some other solicitor to take up my case; but *mon cher* Monsieur Prossiter, you make a very great mistake if you think I have returned to England the fool I left it—not quite. In six days' cross-examination you would get no more out



of me, in a witness-box, than I chose to tell you. Not things to my credit these, but they are the outcome of experiences. If you are contesting my claim in anybody else's interest, say so, and I will put myself in the hands of another of your craft."

"Captain Riversley, you are doing me great injustice," rejoined Mr. Prossiter. "You must make allowances for our extremely awkward position. Pray remember, I have no personal knowledge of you whatever, nor has any one connected with the firm. We have had many unmistakably bogus applications for advances on this inheritance, and it really behoves us to be careful. We have no interest whatever, beyond placing the property in the hands of its lawful inheritor. If he thinks fit to continue us as his solicitors, I frankly admit we should like it; but, remember, that is by no means so big a thing that a firm like ours need stoop to scheme for it. If, as I presume, you are Captain Frederick Riversley, you will find us, once satisfied on that point, ready to facilitate your taking possession of your property in every way. If you doubt me, ask Lord Lithfield, who is one of the trustees."

"Lithfield one of the trustees," said the Guardsman, musingly. "Now, why the deuce couldn't you tell me that before? You go on pegging away on your cursed detective principle, obviously regarding me as an impostor, and so keeping me in ignorance of every detail regarding my inheritance that it is important I should know. What is Lord Lithfield's address?"

Mr. Prossiter was staggered. This, at all events, did not look as if the man before him was an impostor. If he were not really Captain Frederick Riversley, he surely would not desire to see the Viscount. Here Mr. Prossiter's want of criminal practice stood somewhat in his way, and led him into unjustified deductions. Because the culprit should manifest curiosity concerning the whereabouts of the detective, it does not follow that he is desirous of an interview. Socially, to acquire knowledge of where your pet aversions are spending their holidays, is eminently useful, but you do not, as a rule, when such knowledge comes, select such places for enjoying your own in.

The lawyer wrote three lines on a sheet of note-paper,

and, passing it across to his visitor, observed, "That is Lord Lithfield's address, Captain Riversley. You can do no better than call at once upon him. He will naturally recognize you, and, as an old friend of your family's, and also of Mr. George Latimer's, that will pretty well establish your identity. Satisfy your trustees, remember, and we are powerless. It would be nothing to us if we handed over the property to the wrong man, at their bidding. The responsibility is theirs, we are merely their legal advisers."

"Just so; that would naturally occur to any one," observed the ex-Guardsman, sententiously. "The only wonder is, that a professional gentleman, like yourself, should waste so much unnecessary time by leaving an unprofessional man like me to slowly work out information, which it must be obvious that, whether the right man or not, I ought to be put in immediate possession of."

To say that Mr. Prossiter was astonished at this speech, is little; he was a good deal more—he was irritated. It was somewhat contemptuous, and, to make matters worse, Mr. Prossiter, loth though he might be to acknowledge it, was conscious there was a terrible amount of common sense in it.

"We are in a difficult situation, Captain Riversley. We must proceed with caution."

"An over amount of which is the prelude to interminable law-suits and undecisive campaigns. You must give me certain information before I even know what case I have to establish. Now we come to another point."

"Very critical point this," thought the lawyer—"one scarce likely not to be touched upon. An advance of money, of course, and I wonder to what extent his demand will reach."

"May I ask what that is?" said Mr. Prossiter, at length.

"Quite right if you can't guess. I should have imagined you might have divined. Of course, I want the name of the other trustee."

Mr. Prossiter positively swelled with indignation. To be lectured by a broken dandy on professional matters would have roused most men in his position. He gulped

down his wrath and suppressed his surprise, and, with some little effort, answered—

“Mr. Deblitz, the great city financier.”

“You were accidentally right,” observed Captain Riversley, slowly. “Don’t know Deblitz. Don’t know that I ever even heard of Deblitz. He’s no use to me. Points you want, in first instance, are recognition by my father and Lord Lithfield—those satisfactorily established, it will be for Deblitz, or you in his name, to say what more you require. You will naturally suppose that I shall want money. Of late years I have never met any one who didn’t; and even in the old London time, there was a thirst for hundreds characterised most of my set. However, my old friends, the Jews, will doubtless do one more bill for me under the circumstances if it becomes imperative.”

“At the risk of being considered impertinent, Captain Riversley, I must venture to remind you that your dealings with the money-lenders are reputed to have cost you dear in the old days—in short, to have led to your exile. There is a large sum of ready money lying to your credit at Coutts’s—the accumulations of income during the last year.”

If Mr. Prossiter had been told that he should volunteer a loan, at the beginning of this interview, he would have retorted, “That will be a proof that I am convinced it is Captain Riversley.” Mr. Prossiter certainly had arrived very much at that conclusion, and yet, must have admitted that the gentleman before him had produced no proof of his identity whatever; while the lawyer, if he had not actually offered to advance money, had certainly now given Riversley encouragement to ask for it.

“I dare say Lithfield will advance me what I shall require to start with; in the meanwhile there is obviously nothing more to be done till I have seen the Viscount.” So saying, the Captain rose, nodded carelessly to Mr. Prossiter, and lounged out of the office.

“Hum!” said the lawyer. “The Captain has always been described to me as an extremely pleasant fellow; if this be the real man, and I suppose he is, I can only say, tastes differ. I certainly am not struck with him in that

respect. There was only one thing struck me as curious. Although he said he knew George Latimer, he never mentioned that Mr. Latimer was his uncle. He might have considered that he had no expectations from him, no doubt, although, from all accounts, I should have imagined the reverse ; but it was odd his not alluding to their relationship. However, the steps he proposes to take are certainly such as Frederick Riversley would naturally take. No two people better able to recognize him than his father and Lord Lithfield, and, of course, it is all-important to him to satisfy the latter of his identity."





## CHAPTER XI.

### CAPTAIN RIVERSLEY NUMBER TWO.

**M**R. PROSSITER meditated, slept over the reappearance of Captain Riversley, and then, according to the Viscount's request, indited a letter in which he informed him of his ward's arrival in town, and of his interview with himself.

"The suavity and geniality with which your lordship has always credited Captain Riversley, I must with due deference to your opinion insist that I entirely failed to discover. It may be, he reserves those charms in his character for his intimates, and holds that solicitors, doctors, &c., are not to be treated with ordinary courtesy. Were I his physician, I own I should a little aggravate his gout; were I *his* solicitor, I should feel strongly tempted to decline further management of his affairs; but at present I am acting for you and Mr. Deblitz. He is extremely anxious to see you, which looks very much as if he was the real man. His incivility to myself also goes to confirm this. Such peculiar cases as Captain Riversley's are a little out of our line, I grant you, but inheritors of property are people of whom we have much experience. While licking their lips over the honeycomb, their tongues are generally of the saccharine order, whatever they may be when the contents of the hive are once in their possession. In short, I think no one but 'the genuine article' would have been so curt and brusque in his language. On

the other hand, although admitting at once that he knew Mr. Latimer well, he derided the idea of having profited by his death, and never alluded to their relationship. I purposely abstained from pressing him on that point. You will say, 'Why?' Because, if he had looked liked turning out an impostor, it struck me that was probably the weak place in his imposition. As I have said, I came to another conclusion; but had it been otherwise, it would have been foolish to thus suggest to him a weak point in his case, and one requiring little difficulty to amend. A somewhat conclusive thing too, in my mind, was this: although admitting that he should probably require money speedily, he never even hinted that we should advance it, but said quietly he had no doubt that you would let him have all he should require. On the whole, I fancy we have found the wanderer."

Such was the substance of Mr. Prossiter's letter, which was duly posted to Lord Lithfield's house in Eaton Place. Two days afterwards, as the lawyer was busily engaged in the study of some mortgage deeds, the bell from below signalled there was a message waiting at the other end of the pipe. Mr. Prossiter crossed the room, and signalled back that he was all attention.

"Captain Riversley wishes to see you, sir," was whispered up the pipe.

"Shall be at Captain Riversley's disposal in about ten minutes," whispered Mr. Prossiter back, in thoroughly conventional fashion; and then, throwing himself back in his chair, he began to wonder what it was that "the Captain" had come about.

He can hardly have seen Lord Lithfield, mused the lawyer, or else I *do* think I should have had a line from the Viscount. Yet he may, and bring a note with him. No! Lithfield out of town most likely, and he wants an advance. Well, right man or wrong, the money question was certain to rise speedily to the surface. He rose, called, "Ready to see Captain Riversley," down the pipe, and then resuming his seat, quietly awaited the advent of his visitor.

Some two minutes or so, and there was a quiet tap at the door. "Come in!" said the lawyer, rising, and then

stood dumbfounded, for there entered a worn, slight, prematurely-aged man, his dark hair just shot with gray, tolerably well dressed, but in garments of an unmistakably provincial, foreign cut. He was about the same height, he was about the same build, about the same age, and of much the same complexion as the ex-Guardsman of two days ago—but that was all; there was no possibility of mistaking the one man for the other, once you fairly saw their faces.

“Captain Frederick Riversley?” said the lawyer, interrogatively.

“Just so,” replied the new comer, in soft *trainante* tones. “Mr. Prossiter, I presume! ah, I see it is so; had we not better sit down, as our interview must occupy some little time?”

“He’s no more like the photograph than the other,” thought Mr. Prossiter, “but people change and photographs fade, so that don’t count for much.”

“You are, of course, astonished that a perfectly broken man like myself should have so long neglected to inquire about an inheritance of any sort that might be due to him; but you see, in the Zingari tents, where I have lived of late, we don’t get either our cream or our papers with much regularity.”

“Extraordinary,” muttered Mr. Prossiter; “he begins exactly like the other one; the supposition of twins with acute sympathies I thought was confined to the ‘Corsican Brothers.’”

“You don’t really mean to say that you have been living amongst the gipsies, Captain Riversley?”

“No, not exactly,” replied the other, with a faint smile; “but I have dwelt much with those nomad tribes on the continent who get their living by their wits, and am familiar with what a slender living it amounts to at times. Have learned to dine off a twopenny loaf and a bunch of radishes, washed down with a tumbler of *vin ordinaire*. Did I like it? No. I never thirsted for cutlets and ‘Heindseck’ more fiercely. It is with a view to these latter that I am here in answer to your advertisement.”

“Then you know nothing whatever regarding your inheritance?”

"Nothing! Nor who was kind enough to leave it to me."

"Most singular how these two claimants coincide in their views," thought Mr. Prossiter. "I'll question this one on the old lines. You knew Mr. Latimer, perhaps?"

"Oh, yes; who didn't that was in my world of those days? I heard of his death many months ago. Somebody had seen it in the *Times*, and told me. A right good fellow gone, and nobody could regret it more than I did."

"Well, suppose it was he that left you this inheritance, what should you say?"

"That I was extremely grateful and somewhat astonished; but don't you think it would be as well to drop fencing? From what you tell me, I suppose poor George Latimer has left me something. What is it—five hundred, or does it run to a thousand?"

"Extraordinary, the similarity of their views," mused the lawyer; "and if only a third turns up, that three-card trick which I see so often mentioned in the papers will be really nothing to picking out the right man."

"Captain Riversley," he continued, "I may as well tell you at once that your inheritance is very much larger than you suppose; but that there are more Captains Riversley in the field than you. I, as you know, have never seen you before, and therefore can be no judge whatever of your identity; but more competent judges than myself, and it may be the law courts, will have to decide the question of 'Who's who!'"

"What!" replied the other, slowly; "there is another Captain Riversley claiming the property, professing to be Captain Frederick Riversley, late of Her Majesty's Guards, and only son of Sir John Riversley, of Bunnington Park, Hertfordshire."

"Precisely," said the lawyer.

"And he—has he as yet given proof of his identity?"

"No; he called here two days ago, but we are exactly in the same position as regards him that we are to yourself."

"But you can't surely suppose, Mr. Prossiter, that I shall have any difficulty in convincing my old friends who I am!"



"It is very curious," remarked the lawyer, tapping his teeth thoughtfully with his eye-glass; "but he seemed to anticipate no more difficulty than you do on that point."

"But there cannot be two of us."

"Not legally, my dear sir, undoubtedly; and ——" Here Mr. Prossiter paused for a moment, then added, significantly, "and the consequences of inquiry will be unpleasant possibly to one of you."

"And you suppose me to be the impostor?" inquired the other, languidly.

"My dear sir," interposed Mr. Prossiter, quickly; "in my profession we never suppose; we deal in facts, not suppositions. I have already told you that personally I am not competent to form an opinion."

"I wonder what is the first thing to do," said the ex-Guardsman, meditatively.

"The best thing the *right* Captain Riversley can do will be to see Lord Lithfield as soon as possible," rejoined Mr. Prossiter. "He not only is one of the trustees, but knew Captain Frederick Riversley intimately."

"Of course, Lithfield will know me at once, and can tell me what to do next. Thank you, Mr. Prossiter. Lord Lithfield's address is——"

"That," said the lawyer, who had been writing rapidly on a piece of note paper while Riversley was speaking; and so saying, he passed it across to him.

"Still in his old house, I see. Good morning." And Mr. Prossiter's visitor bowed and took his departure.

The lawyer remained for some minutes immersed in thought. "This is about the drollest professional conundrum I have met with in all my experience," he muttered. "Both of these men have a genuine ring about them, and for the life of me I cannot see much to choose between them. Both, odd to say, weak on exactly the same point. Neither seems aware that the testator was his uncle, while each feels quite confident that Lord Lithfield will recognize him at once. Well, that alone must settle one of them. Lithfield may recognize neither, but he cannot recognize both as Frederick Riversley. It really is an interesting case. I should like, on my word, to have a trifling bet on the result. I think I should back the last man; still,

looking at the thing analytically, why? And it at once resolves itself into this, because he had the pleasanter and more courteous manner of the two—as if that constituted evidence. Looking at it without prejudice, the only thing to be said is, that they are evidently both well up in the history of Frederick Riversley, and working in ignorance of each other. I have enlightened the last man with regard to his having an adversary in the field, and as far as I could judge, he was quite taken aback. Might be a little bit of neat acting, though it is hard to see how two pretenders could benefit by collusion. No! depend upon it, each is playing his own hand, and the result must be eminently favourable to justice. Both impostors, and they cut each other's throats; whilst, if either is the true man, he must speedily settle his opponent. Meantime, I think I'll drop Lord Lithfield an account of matters, as he apparently holds the key of the situation." Mr. Prossiter herewith took up his pen, and indited the following epistle:—

“DEAR LORD LITHFIELD,

“We have been very anxious to hear of Captain Frederick Riversley for the last twelve months. He has turned up at last, and, singular to say, in duplicate; that means *two* Captains Riversley have called upon me within the last three days. Either might be the man we seek, but it is quite clear we do not want them both. Although much of the same height, build and appearance, there is no mistaking one for the other. Both speak with equal confidence of at once establishing their identity; and, curiously enough, both appear equally confident of obtaining your immediate recognition. It is the most singular case not only that I ever met with, but that I ever heard of.

“Impostors laying claim to a property of which the rightful heir is missing, there have been many, but I can call no case to mind in which there have been two simultaneous impostors in the field; nor, supposing one of them to be the real man, a case in which the heir and the pretender asserted their claim so immediately together. Captain Riversley No. 2 seemed much astonished upon my informing him of the pretensions of Captain Riversley

No. 1, while I have had no opportunity of letting No. 1 know that he had a rival in the field.

“Now you, of course, will be able at a glance to decide which is the genuine candidate, providing they both call upon you; but the probabilities are strongly against that, and are strongly against any one but the real man actually doing so. Each requested your address; each said the first thing to be done was to see you. If one of them does call, I fancy he will be Captain Frederick Riversley *in propria persona*. He must be a pitiful impostor who would confront you. Neither of these men are that; which is genuine I confess I have no idea, but the pretender or pretenders—for they may be both in the same category—is a clever plausible rogue, and not likely to run the chance of exposure so early in his game. The object must, of course, be the advance of a good round sum, for no adventurer would be foolhardy enough to try and carry the fraud through.

“I’ll admit that my impression in the first instance was that Captain Riversley No. 1 was the right man, and it would probably be so still had it not been for the appearance of Captain Riversley No. 2. Now, I confess to being fairly at sea. That my first visitor did not ask for a pecuniary advance astonished me, but my second also made no application on that score. You may depend upon it, the impostor or impostors are of no ordinary calibre. That each is up in the ordinary salient points of Frederick Riversley’s life, as far as I know them, I need scarcely add, with perhaps this somewhat remarkable exception; neither mentioned the fact that George Latimer was his uncle. I cannot say they are not aware that it was so; I only say, upon hearing he was the testator, each claimed to know him well, but neither mentioned what one would have expected, namely, their relationship to him.

“I refrained purposely from questioning them on this point, by reason that ignorance of who Lady Riversley was is apparently the weak point in either hand; but their attention once called to such knowledge being expected of them, and nothing would be easier than to obtain it. Of course, Mr. Latimer’s will is explained to

such quick-witted people as these directly they discover Lady Riversley was a Miss Latimer. Both expressed surprise at inheriting a property from the testator; and yet surely Captain Riversley, a favourite and only nephew, might not unreasonably have looked forward to benefiting by his uncle's death. This is a thing, though, of which you would be a better judge than myself. As a prospect utterly unnegotiable, Captain Riversley may have paid little heed to the contingency, but it is curious it should not even occur to him upon hearing Mr. Latimer's name.

"Should you not have already seen either of the claimants, it would conduce I think much to trapping the impostor if you could manage to be out of their way for another fortnight. By that time, I have little doubt that I could contrive a dramatic situation at which I should request you to assist, and which would pretty effectually dispose of certainly one, if not of both, the Captains Riversley.

"I remain,

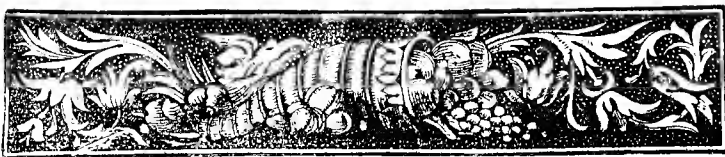
"Yours faithfully,

"ROBERT PROSSITER.

"LINCOLN'S INN FIELDS,

"August 1st, 18—."





## CHAPTER XII.

### THE CARDS DIFFER.

**T**HE lawyer's letter was, to tell the truth, some relief to Lord Lithfield's mind, besides affording matter for great curiosity. As we know he had received Fred Riversley's card just before starting for Brighton, it had never occurred to him to doubt that this was the real Fred Riversley, but he had thought with some compunctions that Riversley might be in sore need of immediate pecuniary assistance. Still he didn't know where the man was, and then, having arranged for "our Goodwood," we do not break such engagements except under dire necessity. He reflected, his people knew his address at Brighton, that all letters could be forwarded to him there, and that he could be back again in town in little more than an hour if he found it necessary. Mr. Prossiter's letter set him at rest on this point. He had no doubt that the lawyer was right, and that it was the genuine Captain Riversley who had called upon him, but it was also clear that he was in no desperate straits for money. Lord Lithfield had liked the broken Guardsman much, and had even proffered assistance when he knew the final catastrophe was impending, but Fred had answered wearily, "Thanks, no; the scrape is a deal too big; let me carry away the luxury of remembering that at all events I didn't let my friends in."

Moreover, Mr. Prossiter apparently deemed it advisable

that he should see neither of the candidates for George Latimer's lands for a fortnight. Well, that would exactly suit him. He could enjoy Brighton, and the two week's Sussex racing, and then give a couple of days, in his way through town, to the Riversley business.

Mr. Prossiter, as the days stole by, was getting more and more astonished at the behaviour of the two claimants. Captain Riversley No. 1 had called, and submitting a paper containing a list of names and a few other facts connected with himself, had demanded whether his substantiating these facts and being spoken positively to regarding his identity by these people, would be sufficient evidence that he was who he represented himself to be. To this Mr. Prossiter had replied in the affirmative, and the Captain had again disappeared, and to the lawyer's immense astonishment without making any application for an advance of money. Captain Riversley No. 2 has simply written a letter dated from the Bath Hotel, Albemarle Street, requesting to be informed of Mr. Deblitz's address. The lawyer instituted inquiries, and ascertained without difficulty that a Capt. Riversley was living quietly at "the Bath;" that he had a bedroom, dined in the coffee-room, and was out the greater part of the day. Further, that he seemed to have no acquaintances, and kept, as the waiter testified, "very much to himself." Of where Captain Riversley No. 1 has pitched his tent Mr. Prossiter is in ignorance. He could find out, doubtless without much difficulty, but he does not think it worth while, and in short would not have made the few inquiries he has in the other's case had it necessitated more than sending a sharp clerk down to Albemarle Street to ask some three or four questions. The Goodwood week has passed and gone, and the next is gliding away, but still the rival candidates for George Latimer's estate give no further sign. Not only is the lawyer puzzled, but he is in some measure irritated. He has got strangely interested in this case, and is anxious, not exactly for the *dénouement*, but that the drama should progress. It is a case quite out of his usual line of business, and there is undoubtedly more romance in criminal law than in the drawing of wills, or preparation of marriage settlements,

But he is also aware that he must wait, that it is not for him to make the next move. He is looking as eagerly forward to the exposure of the impostor as ever a master of hounds looked to a kill at the end of a sharp forty minutes. Still, angling for big criminals, like angling for big fish, necessitates patience. Scotland Yard and the Rue Jerusalem will wait on occasions like Indians on the war path.

Lord Lithfield, likewise, is terribly bitten with this same anxiety, to wit, that the drama should proceed. The Viscount declares that Goodwood bores him. He has attended many a meeting in the park of the Lennox's. He understands what he is about pretty well, and can take very fair care of himself on a racecourse. He is a steady and legitimate speculator, eschewing wild and reckless plunging. Still he has, like all votaries of "the numbers up," experienced the vicissitudes attending such worship. He has had his "good times," and known what it is to be "squeezed;" but this week, although fortune has been propitious, the Viscount declines to be interested. The fact is, he has fought the fell fight with the layers of odds for years, and it is no new sensation; but to be an actual assistant at the unravelling of a species of Gaboriaux puzzle, tickles his sensibilities amazingly. To do him justice, there is more than that. He really is very anxious to see that pleasant cheery youngster of the Guards that he liked so much rescued from his probably vagrant life about cheap continental towns, and taking his place once more amongst his equals in the London world.

"Then what is it that Prossiter means doing? He writes about 'contriving a dramatic situation,' and the more he muses over this the more his curiosity is quickened concerning it. He has had strong theatrical proclivities in his time, but what was the melodrama of the stage to the melodrama of real life? What was "The Ticket-of-Leave," at the Adelphi, to Inspector Wilkinson with the "real bracelets" in Mr. Prossiter's office, accompanied by the recognition of the rightful heir? And Lord Lithfield had no doubt that this was the scene, or some slight variation of it, that the lawyer was preparing for his edification.

That we do some of us get absorbed in great criminal cases there can be no doubt. Look at the extraordinary interest manifested by the public whenever an unusually cruel and elaborate murder is perpetrated, or, for the matter of that, in any great criminal case characterised by what dramatists and romance writers call "construction," that is to say, elaborately mapped out beforehand. This naturally becomes intensified upon finding ourselves prominently mixed up in the matter, and Mr. Prossiter had told the Viscount in his letter that he, Lord Lithfield, appeared to hold the key of the puzzle. "And it was probable he thought he did. If they both appeal to me as to whether they are not Captain Riversley, it is impossible I can make a mistake. Though it is eight years since I last saw Fred Riversley, it is very improbable there is any one so like him that I could not decide off-hand as to which was the real man. Besides, Prossiter says these two men are, though about the same build, stature, and complexion, not at all to be mistaken for one another. It is odd too, very, that Fred Riversley, after calling on me, should not have written. Everything addressed to my London house is sent on here at once, as they would have told him if he had asked. Considering their natural anxiety to see me, I wonder I have not heard from either of them."

So the Viscount lost his money over the Stakes, and landed a *coup* in the Stewards' Cup with serene indifference. It was no use; the curiosity he felt about the rival candidates for the Latimer estates utterly over-shadowed all his interest in the racing, keen turfite as he was as a rule. Nothing but heavily losing could have concentrated his attention on the business of the week; and as men oft-times do when indifferent to success, he won considerably. It is rarely that luck is vouchsafed to that last stake in actual life, often as it answers the purposes of fiction to make it successful.

Of course, Miss Clothele was at Goodwood, and it was more than once upon the Viscount's lips to tell her of the two Captains Riversley. He was aware, of course, that she knew the story of that inheritance, and what a cruel difference it would make to the brother of her friend Maude. Lord Lithfield felt little pity for that young



gentleman. To say the truth, he thought it would do him a deal of good to have to work for his living. He regarded Arthur Riversley as a conceited young idiot, who would become simply insufferable should he come into a good property. The Viscount, like many others, tolerated him for the sake of Maude, whom he honestly thought a charming girl, full of *verve* and vivacity, and with plenty to say on most things. Then, again, Miss Riversley was one of Ethel's intimates, and Lord Lithfield, at present, was burning much incense at that shrine. He always did worship somewhere, and calumny declared changed his goddess every season. It was not quite that, but the Viscount was certainly an adept in what may be termed sauntering through a flirtation. He dreaded scenes, and had once or twice had to betake himself to foreign parts on occasions when the lady had began to take things too much in earnest. He could hardly be held blameless in some of these cases. Young ladies on promotion might be excused for believing that their being made Lady Lithfield was to be the legitimate end of such philandering; but the Viscount never went that far. Experienced maids and matrons of the London world voted him charming. Maidens of two or three seasons' standing, or married women who thoroughly understood the platonic *liaison* in which, as everyone knows, you make believe a great deal, affecting much devotion which never interferes with either slumbers or digestion, and holding scenes or any overstepping of the most conventional love-making, as extremely bad taste, did likewise. The Viscount was liberal in the matter of operaboxes, stalls, bouquets, mostly able to obtain tickets for private views, &c., and was, in short, a very model *cavalier servente*.

But Lord Lithfield felt that under the peculiar circumstances it was best to say nothing about Fred Riversley having at last turned up. Mr. Prossiter's letter certainly did not enjoin secrecy, but it was calculated to give the idea that the intelligence it contained was best kept to himself for the present, and so, though he and Ethel had often talked over Arthur's chance of succession, he said nothing to Miss Clothele on the subject; and yet he was sorely tempted to do so, for it was one on which they held

opposite views, Ethel firmly believing that her friend's brother would eventually succeed to the Latimer property ; while the Viscount was just as strongly convinced that Fred Riversley would turn up in the end. It requires great denial to abstain from proclaiming the triumph of our opinions always, so that it may be conceived, with his head so full of the affair, Miss Clothele narrowly escaped receiving the Viscount's confidence on this occasion.

As for Maude, she had gone back to Clumford with her father and mother. Arthur also had accompanied his family. The fact is, this gentleman saw no way of compassing Goodwood. Started on town with a goodly string of Oxford "ticks" round his neck, and plunged at once into society, a young man of Arthur Riversley's temperament giving himself thoroughly up to the wild revel of his first season, speedily discovers that an allowance of five hundred a year is very inadequate to meet the expenses he is called on to incur. Nobody expected him to entertain, but cabs, gloves, flowers, stalls at theatres, shares of Richmond dinners, an Ascot party, joining a select three or four for Henley regatta, &c., &c., most effectually emptied his pockets, and left him little resource but to take refuge once more beneath the paternal roof-tree. A few months back, and he would have looked forward to thoroughly enjoying the summer in Clumbershire ; now, after the feverish existence he had lately led, he regarded the prospect with horror. It was sheer scarcity of ready money that drove him beneath the family eaves, and he fiercely objurgated the injustice that had decreed he should wait seven years before coming into his property. He already looks upon it as his own, and ponders meditatively upon how he is to exist till he acquires it. He has made life more expensive for himself in London than he need have done, because it tickled his vanity to pass as the heir to five thousand a year. The men of his own standing with whom he associated accepted this statement without challenge. George Latimer's will was a bygone story by this time, and had never attracted more than a few days' wonder even amongst those who had known both the dead and the missing man. The generality of Arthur Riversley's intimates were men of considerably greater means than

himself. It was the old story of the earthen pot swimming amongst those of brass ; and when the brazen vases called to the earthen one to join in the revel, that pitcher of clay was too weak to say no, and, alas ! not strong enough to take part in the dance. Alack, these clay pitchers, how many of them disappear beneath the waters yearly from thinking they can swim with the pots of brass.

Goodwood is over, and still marvelling concerning those two Captains Riversley, Lord Lithfield continues his "punting," *i.e.*, his betting on horses, pigeons, &c., through the Olympic games of Brighton, and the more sedate festival of Lewes. His Lordship gets more bored and more lucky as the fortnight wanes ; and eschewing the Lewes Friday from very weariness, returns to town with an account to settle at Tattersall's on the coming Monday that might gladden the hearts of most men.

On arrival at his own house, he, after the manner of most bachelors, glanced at the rubbish that had accumulated on the writing table in the study—papers, pamphlets, circulars, &c., all of which his well-trained housekeeper knew better than to forward. There were also some few visiting cards, one of which immediately caught his attention—

CAPTAIN FREDERICK RIVERSLEY.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, "this must be the other one. The card I got just before leaving for Goodwood was 'Captain F. Riversley,' and moreover was rather thicker in the engraving, not quite the same, and a little larger, if I don't mistake. The plot thickens ; it is evident that both candidates have faith in my recognizing them. A staggerer this for Prossiter, because one of them must be 'a fraud.'"





## CHAPTER XIII.

MR. PROSSITER AS A DRAMATIST.

**A**RTHUR RIVERSLEY playing lawn tennis in Clumbershire, and thinking that upon the whole it is very good of him to condescend to be amused by such primitive sports, is little aware of the clouds hovering over his horizon. He has proved a most apt pupil in the acquisition of what, in the slang of the day, is denominated "side," which, translated into dictionary language, meaneth the conceit of the young. Never eradicated in some cases, there are men who would like to embark for the other world armed with a crutch-stick, a tooth-pick, and with hands duly clad in black kid instead of more seemly cerements. Some men never become old; some never acquire ordinary prudence; whilst most of us remain fools, more or less, to our end. The acquisition of "side" is considerably easier than the acquisition of money—the reason, probably, ingenious youth invests so freely in it; and could it be possible to in any way look upon it as a profession, Arthur might have been congratulated, but it is not, as a rule, calculated to advance a man's interests in life, albeit professors of the art have shown, when opportunity offered, what far better stuff there was in them. As a rule, the professors of "side" either come to infinite grief, or abandon it after a very few years.

As for Maude, she has thrown herself into all her old country pursuits with glorious *abandon*. She had enjoyed

her two months of London thoroughly—nobody more so, and had entered into everything that came in her way with delight—dance, garden party, cricket match, Hurlingham, or Ascot—nothing came amiss to sunny, bright-tempered Maude. But it was very pleasant to find oneself once more beneath the dear old trees she had known since a child, to trot about the queer, twisting old lanes with their high banks and hedges, to trip across the emerald green meadows, or loiter amongst the rectory strawberry beds. Then there were all her old friends to see and chatter with, and relate her town experiences to. So, upon the whole, Maude was not quite certain whether the best part of an “outing” was not the coming home again. About John Hainton, the girl had by no means made up her mind concerning him, and felt grateful to him for not having brought matters to a crisis; as things stood at present, he had paid her great attention, but he had gone no further. That it rested with her to be mistress of Enderly Park was, she knew, the opinion of her mother and one or two of her mother’s friends—ladies of mature age, and who derive their chief interest in society from watching and speculating on the drama perpetually enacting before their eyes; and how quick these lookers-on are. Where is the man who has not announced some such discovery to the wife of his bosom, and experienced the amused smile with which she listened to his intelligence. When he finds it out, the probability is that the engagement is announced within forty-eight hours, while the partner of his home will tell him she knew that would happen three months back, and that the momentous question was put about ten days ago. Young ladies themselves also are not often taken by surprise; they are usually quite aware when such things are imminent, and Maude certainly thought she had only to give a little encouragement and John Hainton would be at her feet forthwith. The question was, should she give it; and now they were back at Clumford it was a problem likely to be speedily brought before her, if John Hainton was in earnest. Such matters may be enacted and postponed in the crush of the season, but in country quarters it is hard to keep a man at arm’s length.

Miss Clothele and her satellites might be also expected to make their appearance in Clumbershire in another month's time or so, and Maude looked forward to that. She was not given to running up what I will venture to call overwhelming friendships at short notice, but she had certainly been strangely attracted to Ethel, and had seen a good deal of her in London, much to the sullen distaste of Caroline Mangerston, who brooded over that at present utterly unhatched egg of retaliation with persistent patience. Nothing tangible in her mind as yet, but a vague idea that if ever opportunity offered she would settle that imaginary score with Maude Riversley. I don't think Miss Mangerston knew much about Byron, but she was quite impressed with the belief that—

“There never yet was human power  
Which could evade, if unforgiven,  
The patient search, and vigil long,  
Of him who treasures up a wrong.”

Applying equally well to the softer sex, and none the less if the wrong should be somewhat shadowy.

But the main interest of our story centres for the present not in Clumbershire, but in Lincoln's Inn Fields, where Mr. Prossiter sits something like a detective spider waiting to pounce upon spurious flies that may be attracted by the bait of the Latimer estates. About the very time that Lord Lithfield, just returned from Lewes races, is musing over the cards of the two Captains Riversley, Mr. Prossiter is closeted with Captain Riversley No. 1. No. 1. has come to that point at last, the non-insistance of which sooner has so puzzled the lawyer in the case of both claimants—money. *This* Captain Riversley has requested an immediate advance, his slender means being exhausted, and all his efforts to see Lord Lithfield being for the time unavailing, in consequence of that nobleman being out of town. He proposes to go down to Bunnington Park to see his father; he wants money for that purpose, to settle his hotel bill, to buy new clothes with, and for multifarious purposes unnecessary to particularize. He presumes Mr. Prossiter will have no objection to advance a hundred or so.

He says this in a light, easy manner, as if there could be

no doubt about the lawyer drawing a cheque for about double that sum forthwith.

"Very unfortunate Lord Lithfield's being out of town. Did his people say where he was?" asked the lawyer.

"Not precisely, but he's away, or rather went away for Goodwood, as I might have guessed, if I had reflected, he was pretty certain to do; but, you see, I have been out of all this life so long now that I forget the A B C of it. I suppose I can have a hundred on account, at all events?"

"Well, you see, my dear Captain Riversley, the fact is, there are a few little forms that must be complied with. You see, I can't *quite*, on my own responsibility, advance even this trifling sum. I must first communicate with Drummond & Co., who keep the current account of the Latimer estates. It will be well, perhaps, to get one of their cheque books, and I think I'll just drop a line to Mr. Deblitz to let him know what we are doing. Sure to be in town, a man like Deblitz, you know. We should have funds falling and all sorts of stock dropping," concluded the lawyer, smiling and tapping his teeth with his eye-glasses after most jocular fashion, "if such a pillar of the financial world as Deblitz was to be wandering about the Continent."

"But surely it is the custom of you lawyers to make small advances yourselves in cases like mine?"

"Of some firms, doubtless," replied Mr. Prossiter suavely, "but we have always held rigidly apart from the money-lending business."

"Money-lending!" laughed Riversley bitterly. "As if I was asking that of you! Pooh, my good sir! I *am* a judge of kite-flying in all its branches, and have no intention of continuing the study; still, if I can't have this pitiful sum from you, and can't find Lithfield, I see no alternative than to again have recourse to it."

"Pray don't be angry," replied Mr. Prossiter deprecatingly. "To-morrow, Saturday, is really like Sunday. You may say it is a *dies non*. Monday I could make all the necessary arrangements, and if you would call here on Tuesday—or shall I send a clerk up to your hotel? I forget where you said you were staying."

"Nowhere—don't tax your memory. You know I have

never mentioned—I prefer not. It is more economical than correct, and I thought I showed wisdom in choosing it. I didn't. I might have swam in champagne at Long's, and they'd not have troubled me with a bill. Where I have pitched my tent, they are keen on the subject of weekly settlements."

"Excuse me, Captain Riversley, I have no wish whatever to pry into your present residence. I proposed sending a clerk up solely with a view of saving you trouble. Perhaps you will call here on Tuesday. Shall we say twelve—or later, if you prefer it?"

"No—twelve will do very well," rejoined the other, rising. "I will look in at that time, and trust to find you have settled all these fiddling preliminaries. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," replied Mr. Prossiter cheerfully, and then, after some few minutes' counsel with his eye-glasses, the lawyer wrote a letter, which the messenger was directed to take forthwith to Scotland Yard, the result of which was that the next morning saw Mr. Prossiter in close consultation with a slight, dark, wiry little elderly man, whose calling it would have been hard to guess at. He might have been so many things—a first-class artisan, a shrewd, well-to-do tradesman, a surveyor of roads, collector of taxes, or anything of that sort. Nothing in the least remarkable about his appearance; a commonplace little man, with small, rather restless eyes, that was all. He listened attentively to Mr. Prossiter's narrative of the appearance of the two Captains Riversley, and occasionally seemed to check off salient points of the story on his fingers. The lawyer concluded his statement with the pithy remark—

"One at least is an impostor, Mr. Wilkinson. In your opinion, which?"

"Difficult to say as yet, sir. It stands to reason there can be no collusion; even if they are both impostors, depend upon it they are playing independent games. I am sorry you told No. 2 that No. 1 was in the field—that is giving him rather an extra pull; on the other hand, No. 2 makes no secret of his abode, while No. 1 does. There is only one thing puzzles me about the whole business—if either was the genuine man, why didn't he go to about the first man in London he ought to have seen?"



"But they have *both* been to Lord Lithfield, and he was out of town. I had a note from him this morning describing the two cards of different patterns."

"I wasn't thinking of Lord Lithfield, sir. The first man Captain Frederick Riversley ought to have gone to, in my humble opinion, should have been his family solicitor."

"Gad! you're right, Wilkinson; I never thought of that. How stupid of me, to be sure!"

"There's this to be said, Mr. Prossiter—people very often don't do what they obviously ought in these sort of cases, and it is quite likely it may be so in this. An impostor would obviously not dare face him. I don't say it is the case; but an impostor might have ascertained that Lord Lithfield was out of town before he made his call. What do you wish me to do, sir? Am I to take over the case?"

"No, not as yet; I have a plan of my own. You don't know the real Captain Riversley by sight?"

"No, sir."

"But you could have no difficulty about seeing the one at the Bath hotel, I suppose?"

"Not the slightest—I'll engage to see *him* before he goes to bed, if he sleeps there. I should make a point of doing that, anyhow, and I shall know when he goes, and wherever he goes, as long as is deemed advisable, from the time I set eyes on him."

"And about the other?"

"I shall know all about him from the time he leaves your office on Tuesday morning."

"You couldn't find out anything about him before it?" said Mr. Prossiter.

"My dear sir, to search for a man we don't know without a clue to his usual home or haunts is, in London, like looking for the proverbial needle in the haystack. I could not guarantee to find him in a month if he didn't come near the honey-pot—meaning this office. But you say he is to be here on Tuesday, and after that I can safely promise to know where to find him any time."

"Very well, that will do, I dare say; but I don't want the impostor or impostors—for they may both be such—to slip

through my fingers. Now listen—Captain Riversley No. 1, as I have told you, comes here at twelve on Tuesday, by appointment. I intend to write to Captain Riversley No. 2 to call upon me at 12.15 on the same day, and also Lord Lithfield. I need scarcely say, my intention is to confront the two candidates in the presence of the man whom they both claim to know perfectly. I fancy I shall about get at the relative value of their respective claims then."

"Admirable, sir!" exclaimed the detective, with undisguised admiration. "A dramatic situation really worthy of our department. Mr. Prossiter, you are thrown away in your profession, sir—the criminal branch, sir, the criminal branch, is what you are clearly cut out for. I believe you have the same capacity for the enjoyment of an intricate murder case that I have myself. A man who don't *feel* his profession will never do anything big in it, whether his trade lies in trotters or tragedies. But one thing, sir, in which, if you'll excuse the liberty, my experience may be useful—in the matter of detail. You will have separate rooms in which to show the Captains Riversley, of course. Just so," continued Mr. Wilkinson, in reply to the lawyer's nod, "and Lord Lithfield —"

"Will be shown straight up to mine, and his arrival will be the signal for Captain Riversley No 1 being sent up. Captain Riversley No. 2 I shall call down through the pipe for two or three minutes later. Now for your plan of operations."

"I, and one of my men, have nothing to do further than be lounging opposite your office a few minutes before the clock strikes twelve. It will make matters quite simple if you will give orders that the clerk who shows Captain Riversley No. 1 into the waiting-room shall immediately come to the door with a paper in his hand, and look into the square. We shall be sure of our man then, and I will undertake not to lose sight of him again. My assistant can follow the other to the Bath, if wanted, or attend to anything else that may turn up. A spare hand is very useful in these cases, and sometimes, at the outset, saves a deal of time, trouble, and expense. Two clues, for instance, Mr. Prossiter! You follow 'em both at once, and

when the one man finds himself on a false scent, it doesn't signify, the man on the real trail is sticking to it; but when there's only one in it, by the time he's discovered that he is on a bogus track and harked back, the scent has grown cold, and the quarry gets difficult to follow."

Mr. Wilkinson spoke as an enthusiast on big game shooting might speak of his experiences in India or Central Africa, and upon Mr. Prossiter assuring him that his wishes should be attended to, took his departure with a bow that strongly emphasised his admiration of the lawyer's plot. That gentleman rapidly penned, first his note to Captain Riversley No. 2, requesting to see him at 12.15 on Tuesday, on some important business, bearing reference to his Latimer estates. He then wrote to Lord Lithfield, begging him to attend at his office at 12.15 punctually on Tuesday, when the dramatic situation he had promised him should take place. He further particularly requested that he would be "not at home" to either Captain Riversley, before his visit to Lincoln's Inn Fields. Those two notes despatched, not by post, but by trusty emissaries, and Mr. Prossiter left the office with a decided chuckle over his day's work.

It was sweet titillation of his vanity the unqualified admiration the hard-headed detective had expressed for his little plot; and, although Mr. Prossiter had as little of that weakness about him as most of us, yet there is no man living who is not to be tickled as you once ascertain what it is he piques himself upon. Then, again, Mr. Prossiter really was immensely curious to see how the sensational scene he had put together with no little thought and trouble would come off. He felt as a dramatic author might do who had left his exponents to finish the piece according to their own views—ignorant as any other of the audience as to the final result.





## CHAPTER XIV.

### MR. PROSSITER'S PLAY COMES OFF.

**F**ORD LITHFIELD, as a rule, never appears in his pretty dining room before twelve. His lordship is an essentially late man in his risings up and lyings down, and holdeth the British breakfast in undisguised contempt. The one drawback to hunting, in his eyes, is that you must make that early meal or starve. The Viscount's view of life was an enjoyable dejeuner, virtually luncheon, at any time from twelve to two that happened to suit him ; but his soul is vexed with curiosity concerning these two Dromios, with whose rightful or wrongful impersonation he is so immediately connected. He enters his dining-room at half-past eleven this morning, and having hastily discussed a slice of reindeer tongue and a glass of Leoville, orders his brougham to be round in fifteen minutes. He is at Lincoln's Inn Fields a little before the appointed time, and is at once shown up into Mr. Prossiter's room.

The lawyer shakes him warmly by the hand, and, quivering with excitement exclaims—

“ Everything going admirably, my lord. Captain Riversley No. 1 is in a room downstairs waiting to see me—you are here. Captain Riversley No. 2 will be in another room downstairs in a few minutes, and then the play begins. Enter Claimant the first. I shall see if he knows you, or you him—two minutes. Enter Claimant the second. You

will be able to reckon him up, and I shall have brought the family together, you see. When the wrong Captain or Captains Riversley take their departure, Inspector Wilkinson, of the detective police, and his myrmidons, are waiting opposite to track them home. We know all about one man's habitation, but nothing about the other's, and to-morrow we can lay the impostor by the heels."

A ping of the bell, and Mr. Prossiter jumps up to the speaking-tube, returns the signal, and awaits the whispering message.

"It's all right!" he cries, radiantly; "No. 2 has arrived."

Then, placing his lips to the tube, he murmurs down it, "Show up the first Captain Riversley that arrived."—"But, my lord, may I trouble you just to sit at the desk, and take up a pen?"

"What! you want to pass me off as a clerk," said the Viscount, laughing, as he complied with the request.

"Not quite; but you will look as if you were engaged here in business of some kind."

Another minute there came a sharp tap at the door, and then Captain Riversley entered. He cast a quick glance round the room as he shook hands with the lawyer, and then his eyes rested on Lord Lithfield. He gazed at him keenly, Mr. Prossiter in the meantime eyeing him over the tops of his double glasses quite as sharply. The Viscount looked up and met the steady stare of the intruder with the utmost serenity for a few seconds, and then feigned to be absorbed in his writing.

"Lord Lithfield don't know Captain Riversley No. 1," murmured the lawyer.

"I understood our interview was to be a private one, remarked the ex-Guardsman with some hauteur. "I had better wait till that gentleman has finished his business with you." Captain Riversley evidently knew better than to mistake Lithfield for a lawyer's clerk.

"Riversley the first don't recognise Lord Lithfield," mused Mr. Prossiter. "Hem! I beg your pardon, but that gentleman is rather essential to this meeting being satisfactory to you. Your object, if I am not mistaken, to-day, is an advance of money to enable you to visit your

father, fit yourself out, assume your proper position, &c. That gentleman represents Messrs. Drummond & Co., the receivers of the Latimer rents, and, of course, holders of the accumulated income since Mr. Latimer's decease."

It was in some sort true. As one of the trustees, Lithfield might indirectly claim to represent the bankers, as it was certain they would advance no money without his authority. Captain Riversley No. 1 regarded the Viscount with some interest. He represented what he was anxious to obtain—money.

"I presume you have some evidence of your identity to put before us. We must have some, you know, even to advance you a hundred pounds," remarked the lawyer, drily.

"And if you don't assist me with funds, how can I prove my identity? Lithfield,—all the men I thought I could have relied on, are out of town. I must go down to Bunnington. I suppose you will credit Sir John's testimony as to who I am?"

"Certainly. Excuse me for one moment," and the lawyer turning round to the pipe, struck the bell, and as soon as he heard the answering signal, whispered down it. His companions both watched his proceedings closely—the Viscount with intense interest, the Captain with some slight astonishment.

Another moment the door opens, and Captain Riversley No. 2 enters, and is coming forward to shake hands with the lawyer when he catches sight of his namesake, and stops short with the ejaculation of "Solano!"

Mr. Prossiter had looked forward to a dramatic situation, and he had decidedly got it. That the two men knew each other was evident—that each was much surprised at the other's presence there could be no doubt.

"I see, gentlemen, you are old acquaintances," said the lawyer. "I might have guessed as much, seeing that you are probably near relations."

"Don't jump at conclusions, unsupported by evidence, my legal friend," remarked Captain Riversley No. 1, with perfect *nonchalance*. "You have been impressing the necessity of that uncomfortable logic severely upon me, and now you are running riot like a puppy on the same line."

Mr. Prossiter was extremely nettled at this rather impertinent speech. He quite made up his mind about the speaker, and entertained no doubt of his being an impostor. About the other he couldn't say, as yet. "I may have been deceived by the name," he replied; "at all events, I have great pleasure in bringing the *two* Captains Riversley together."

"Do you mean to say this man Solano, here, calls himself Captain Riversley?" exclaimed the last comer.

"Most certainly," replied Mr. Prossiter, briefly.

"And, may I ask, why the devil you've assumed my name, sir?" he continued, turning sharply round on the unabashed impostor.

"Well, you didn't seem inclined to take it up, and I could not stand that advertisement in the daily papers going so long unanswered. I am always willing to look into cases in which property is wanting an owner—especially when I know so much as I did about this case. I thought it worth coming over about, and seeing if I could get a slice out of the cake. Obviously, the best plan was to come under your personality."

"But you don't mean to say that you ever thought it possible to establish a claim to the Latimer estates?" suddenly interposed the Viscount.

"No," returned Solano (as we may as well now call him); "an advance of two or three hundreds was all I meant to try for, but"—here he stopped, for the other Captain Riversley pushed past him, and extending his hand, said—

"How are you, Lithfield?"

"Very glad to see you back amongst us once more, Fred," said the Viscount, as he heartily wrung the hand stretched out to him. "You are changed a good deal, and I hardly knew you when you first came into the room. This is the man we want, Mr. Prossiter; and, as far as ready money goes, I am willing to be his banker till we can arrange for his coming into his own. As for this gentleman," continued the Viscount, "I presume we shall meet him again very shortly."

"Doubtful, my lord," rejoined that unblushing impostor. "I shall most likely return to the Continent."

"That, I fancy, will depend upon the view twelve of your countrymen take of your talent for personation."

"Not at all. There's nobody to take any proceedings against me save Captain Riversley; and Fred Riversley won't," rejoined Solano, somewhat defiantly.

Mr. Prossiter took off his eye-glasses, beat the "devil's tattoo" on his teeth with them, and winked as if he were being galvanized. Lord Lithfield looked amazed, and at last both men, by common impulse, turned their eyes on Riversley.

"And why should I not?" said Fred, sharply.

"For the sake of the days that are past—because we know so much of each other; because," concluded the other, carelessly, "you are a good fellow, and wouldn't be hard upon a poor devil down in his luck."

"You seem to pin your faith, sir, upon Captain Riversley's good nature. Have you taken mine into account?" interposed Lithfield.

"I don't see that it is any affair of yours," rejoined Mr. Solano, doggedly.

"Don't you? As one of the trustees to the Latimer estates, I should have had to bear the half of whatever plunder you might have succeeded in carrying off. I have really more case against you than Captain Riversley."

Solano was silent for a minute or two, and then said—

"Yes, I suppose you have; but, if Riversley lets me go free, I should think you could afford to also. It's not much use hunting a broken man down."

"Do you mean letting this man go, Fred?" asked the Viscount.

"Yes," returned Riversley, in a low voice. "I knew him well over there in my bad days, and I'll not be hard upon him now. You will oblige me by doing the same."

"Very well, but upon one condition."

Solano raised his head quickly.

"That he satisfies my curiosity upon two or three points."

"Is it about my past life?" he demanded, eagerly.

"No, only about your present imposture."

Solano's face broke into a smile of relief as he answered quietly—



"Any questions Lord Lithfield chooses concerning that I am quite willing to answer."

"What induced you to call upon me? You couldn't suppose I should mistake you for Captain Riversley?"

"No. I took especial pains that you should not see me. I knew you were not at home when I called, and knew also that you were leaving town the same afternoon. Your return to town I never calculated on. I purposely never came near Mr. Prossiter till the very end of the season, so that there was little likelihood of any of Riversley's old intimates being left in London."

"You seem to know our London life well. May I ask, did you ever mix in it?"

"Yes. But allow me to observe that is trenching on the past."

"One thing more. Your name, Mr. Solano, is foreign, but you speak English as if born here. Are you an Englishman?"

"I am of no country," returned the other, bitterly. "Names are assumed as easily as clothes. I have travelled under that of Solano for some time. As for languages, I speak most Latin languages indifferently well—French, Spanish, and Italian."

"And, I should imagine, play most games of cards with similar facility," observed the Viscount. "Thank you for answering my questions."

Mr. Solano picked up his hat, bowed quietly to the Viscount and Mr. Prossiter, then, crossing, exclaimed, "One word, Riversley." He muttered something eagerly into the latter's ear, to which that gentleman made a hurried response, of which "Bath Hotel, Albemarle Street," was alone audible to the others, and then Mr. Solano disappeared.

The lawyer was sadly disappointed at the upshot of his drama. He had quite counted upon the sequel. He had pictured the Viscount keen and implacable in prosecution, and had misgivings about the reality of Fred Riversley still, owing to the miserable Christian spirit he was displaying in the affair. He entreated them both to reconsider the thing, and urged that it was monstrous to allow such abrazened swindler to escape. But Fred Riversley

replied that his word was passed, and the Viscount added that he was similarly committed.

Mr. Prossiter consoled himself, as the pair departed, with the thought that, at all events, Wilkinson would know where to find the delinquent should either of his clients change their mind, and that it was possible, when the sagacious Wilkinson came to what is termed "reckon Mr. Solano up," he might recognise him as an old offender who had been long wanted.





## CHAPTER XV.

### QUONDAM FRIENDS.

**M**R. SOLANO walked away from Mr. Prossiter's office in what is denominated "a brown study." "Neat, very neat," he muttered to himself; "to think that old Six-and-eightpence there had so much gumption in him. It was a very pretty trap, and very prettily sprung; and he had me, and no mistake. Done, yes, diddled; and I thought I had rather an easy-going lawyer to deal with. Yes, it's these innocents always do clear us out. The old story. I thought he was not very good at the game, and he'd two aces up his sleeve all the time. He'd make it lively for 'the Heathen Chinee' even. Vicious old brute, too, he was all for consigning me to dungeons deep, and proceeding to all sorts of unpleasantness. No; I have made a mess of it; a great mess of it, and with such a deal better game to play. Only I thought Fred Riversley would never turn up again. I'd never have made such a fool of myself, especially if I had enjoyed a little previous knowledge of Prossiter. However, things were getting desperate, and I thought, with my intimate knowledge of Fred Riversley's life and belongings, I might have made something out of the personation. That's over. What is to be the next move?"

Musing in this wise, Solano paced along Great Queen Street and Long Acre, crossed Leicester Square, and turned

up Princes Street, utterly unconscious of an eidolon, in the shape of a seedy-looking man, who lounged leisurely after him, never approaching very near to him, except he turned off his direct path, and then dropping back the minute he had again sighted him. He might have been a clerk out of employ ; he was Inspector Wilkinson.

“ No, Fred Riversley,” continued Solano, pursuing the thread of his meditations ; “ I’m not going to part with you for the present. I don’t think you can quite afford to quarrel with me. I could divulge enough to swamp you in the London world, and you know it. *Bon camarades* we were once, and I intend we shall be so again ; not the less, *mon ami*, because you happen to be so much better worth it now than in the times past. Yes, if he takes to racing, he will want a master of the horse ; and I don’t think Newmarket will get much the better of me. He’ll want a confederate, anyway, whatever he may take to, and that I intend to be. Yes, my dear Fred, I intend to be your *fidus Achates* for the present, and will take very good care, for my own sake, you don’t fall into the hands of the Philistines a second time.”

So scheming, Solano made his way up Wardour Street, crossed Oxford Street, and turning up Wells Street, disappeared, much to Mr. Wilkinson’s astonishment, in Fusby’s Hotel. Fusby’s is not the place to which you would expect a gentleman of Monsieur Solano’s doubtful antecedents and principles to betake himself. The detective was somewhat nonplussed. Gentlemen of what the detective deemed Mr. Solano’s profession, *i.e.*, swindling, usually give the best hotels or expensive lodgings the benefit of their patronage, especially when they are artists of the first class, and Inspector Wilkinson unhesitatingly classed the sham Captain Riversley in that category, as he considered that nothing but the audacity born of scores of successful impositions would have inspired such a bold and hazardous attempt.

Now Fusby’s is a retiring fifth-rate family hotel—not an inviting place by any means. Its façade suggests to the observer’s mind, bugs ; a glimpse at the coffee-room windows conjures up misgivings concerning the cruets, and doubts anent the purity of the table linen. One feels

by intuition that *the* waiter—I doubt a second—as well as the cheeses, are mouldy. I believe the bedrooms to be stuffy, and the washing utensils of limited size. Upon the whole, I shouldn't much care about staying at Fusby's.

The detective, taking stock of the outside of Fusby's, arrives at all these conclusions, upon the same grounds that the narrator did when he studied Fusby's; but with the detective it raised this point: why did a man of Solano's appearance and habits take up his abode in a place so opposed to the custom of his brethren under like circumstances? Bear in mind that Inspector Wilkinson knew nothing of what had taken place in Mr. Prossiter's office, and you will not be so much surprised at the idea that struck him; namely, that this was the true Captain Riversley, and the gentleman residing at the Bath the impostor; that latter decidedly the more likely hotel for a first-rate artist to fix upon as his head-quarters.

"However, if I'm wrong," said Inspector Wilkinson, "I shall try to cypher out this; and Mr. Prossiter, I take it, knows by this time which of the two is a decided sham. In the meanwhile, it is well to make all safe." And with that the inspector crossed the street, and lounging into the bar of Fusby's Hotel, asked the young lady behind the counter to oblige him with "six of cold pale." Leisurely sipping his brandy-and-water, Mr. Wilkinson was pervaded with an overpowering curiosity concerning Fusby's. It was a very old house, was it not? Not so very. Well, he was surprised to hear that. It was the famous one drawn by Dickens in one of his books. Well, he couldn't recollect which, but it was in one of them. The young lady thought it might be, and wondered whether she was in too. The inspector gallantly replied there could be little doubt about that, if she were only old enough; but that book, he thought, had come out seven or eight years back. That settled it, the young lady replied. She had been only there two years, and this was her first place.

"I suppose you are generally very full?" asked the inspector.

"Pretty well. We do a fair business."

"Country people mostly, I suppose?"

"Yes; tradespeople, farmers, and such like. They are

good customers, but the first are troublesome about their buttered toast; they seem to think it ought to be all butter; while the farmers really don't act fair by the cold meat—giving them lunch at eighteenpence is dead loss."

"Yes, those healthy country appetites must be trying for your business; but I suppose they make up for it in beer."

"Oh, they do that; they are good customers to the bar," said the girl, laughing. "Plenty of malt to wash down the beef, and several goes of something hot before going to bed."

"Ah! there's a friend, well, hardly that, an acquaintance of mine, uses your house at times. Mr. Riversley—do you know him?"

"No. I don't even recollect the name; and I think I should. It's rather a pretty one."

"Well, that's odd; because I rather thought if he wasn't actually here now, he had been—dark gent, about forty, rather a swell. Certain to take notice of a pretty girl like you."

"Oh, I don't want customers taking notice of me. I haven't time for such nonsense," rejoined the young lady, with a coquettish toss of her head, that directly negatived the assertion.

"Ah! it's evident you never saw Mr. Riversley."

"One'll get over that if one lives long enough, I dare say," rejoined the damsel, pertly; but for the matter of that, we have a dark gent, a regular swell, staying in the house now, who always makes me a compliment as he passes."

"Ah, but it's not Riversley."

"No, this is a foreign gentleman, I think, though he speaks English beautifully. Monsieur Solano—see, there's his page in the ledger."

"Ah! the good-looking man who passed me at the corner of the street, and came in here a minute or two before me."

"Just so; do you know anything about him?"

"Nothing. He looks a regular swell; but, bless you, you know all about him. At all events more than any one in Fusby's, I'll be bound. His sort ain't likely to talk much to any one here but you; and talk we all must."

Ain't I running on like an old eight-day clock myself, and with an appointment to keep up at the top of Oxford Street? Good-bye, miss. Mind, I've a card all reg'lar for the wedding, and if he ain't good-looking, I'll forbid the banns."

"Go along with your nonsense," rejoined the barmaid, giggling. "Good-bye, and don't be long before you come and see us again."

"You! you mean, my love." And with a pantomimic gesture of deepest devotion, Mr. Wilkinson took his departure.

"Curious, this," he muttered; "living here under the name of Solano. If he's not Captain Riversley, I wonder who he is. I shouldn't think this is his first dive into the pockets of the public. If he's an Englishman, I should think some of us in 'the Yard' ought to be able to put a name to him; but his putting up at Fusby's is what licks me."

At nine o'clock that evening, Fred Riversley and Monsieur Solano might have been seated in a private room at the Bath. Two or three decanters, and the *débris* of dessert, remained on the table between them, and the two men lounged back in their chairs in enjoyment of their after-dinner cigarette, with the aspect of men who had dined satisfactorily.

"We've plenty to talk over since we last met," exclaimed Solano, after a long pause. "I have congratulated you, and now," he continued, as he leant forward for the claret jug, "I'm going to drink your health. Here's a bumper to you on coming into your inheritance, and may you live long enough to spend every shilling of it."

"You don't suppose I'm such a fool as I was when I had to fly England eight years ago, do you?" retorted Fred Riversley, sharply.

"No, I should trust not; besides, you will have the advantage of being always able to command my advice; and—well, I've been pretty well through the mill."

"It is possible you may not be always available," replied the other, with a sneer. "I've a hazy notion that a stirring up of old stories might make London rather too hot for you."

"I don't deny it," replied Solano, quietly, "but then who is to disturb those pools of oblivion? Not you, for you know nothing of my history further than the guess you have just hazarded."

"You are right, though perhaps a little inquiry might enlighten me concerning it. Whatever you might choose to say to-day in Lincoln's Inn Fields, of course I know that you are an Englishman, and were a man about town at one time. I know also that Solano is not your real name. I sha'n't seek to know anything about your past, unless I find it necessary in self-defence."

"Ah! I understand; you wish to have done with me," said Solano, very slowly.

"On the contrary," returned Riversley; "I think you can be of great use to me; but the sooner you clearly understand that we stand in very dissimilar relations to each other to those we stood in three years ago, the better. Perhaps it would be as well if I recapitulated them."

Solano emitted a thin cloud of tobacco smoke, but vouchsafed no remark.

"When we first met abroad, I was a broken man, struggling hard to eke out the trifling annual stipend I still drew from my father, by play—my sense of honour growing duller day by day. It was reserved for you to quench my last spark of self-respect. You found me a man waxing loose in principle; a few months in your school, and the last shred was gone. It was you first taught me that I was a child in play, as understood in those parts; that the real science of play was an adroit manipulation of the cards, a shrewd observation of your opponent's countenance, and the countless other almost imperceptible signs by which a gamester follows the very mind of his antagonist. The night you condescended to give me my first lesson in real *écarté*, I don't forget. The stake was merely nominal, but the lesson a revelation. You told me I had the king in my hand upon one occasion of my dealing, and when I asked how you knew it, laughed, and said a child could have guessed it by my glancing at my markers. As for you, you held them when you pleased. It was you preached to me the doctrine that all men who had learned to gamble played in this wise. That the poor fools who played 'on



the square' (so you called them) only did so for lack of education ; that the game of life was the same all round ; that racing was conducted on the same principle. I knew you lied ; but I was very miserable, very poor, and very weak. I turned robber like yourself, and joined with you in spoiling the Egyptians. You know what a pleasant life it was. We lived on the best ; but under the surveillance of the police. We won with the chance of being called cheats, and kicked, every day of our lives. Ready to settle matters always with the pistol if we could ; but men of the world don't think it necessary to go out with a black-leg. You were my master then. I want you to understand I'm thoroughly out of leading-strings now."

"Somewhat mawkish sermonising, my dear Riversley," replied the other, "although I am glad you appreciate my tuition. I found you a mere gosling amongst the gamecocks. I taught you to use your spurs, that's all. If you mean you require a trainer no longer, perhaps not. But there is an old and salutary custom which obtaineth in this country, namely, the pensioning off of old and *valued* servants."

"Ha, my friend ! you still won't take a hint. Oh, fail not to credit one who has drank wisdom from your lips, with being able to play a handful of trumps against you. Suppose I say, no : you never get a penny-piece from me—what can you do ? Brand me as a card-sharper ; but do you think society will believe your story ? You all but taken in custody for personating me ; bah ! the detectives were at your heels from the moment you crossed Prossiter's door this morning."

Solano could not suppress a slight start of surprise.

"Remember you are playing single-handed against the *bank* this time, if you quarrel with me. I fancy that for a thousand, with the assistance of the police, I could unravel your former life in a very short time. Sir John Riversley's heir, with five thousand a year, and the experience you have taught him, is a very different man to combat from the broken-down greenhorn over whom you obtained such ascendancy at Nice."

Solano had arrived at the Bath with little doubt about reasserting his influence over his old pupil ; but he had

lost sight of him for the last four years, and forgot to allow for the effect of that space of manumission on his apprentice. During that time Riversley had assumed supremacy in his turn over many weaker vessels. They met again as cocks of game, both; and the younger man with all the advantages of money and position, and appreciating the value of these acquisitions to their last fraction. Solano was much too quick not only to understand all this, but to see that his quondam pupil thoroughly understood it too. That idea, of being under the surveillance of the police, troubled him; he was averse to people prying into his affairs, especially people of that description. He thought it best to make no answer, but smoked silently on.

"You saw the king in my face, Solano, that first night at *écarté*, near eight years ago; I see a deficiency of trumps in yours now. Listen to me. I have no knowledge, remember, whatever of your past, and your real name is quite unknown to me. Now, I will draw your English career. You know this London world in a way, but you were never of it—that is, you never were in London Society. How do I know that? By the freemasonry with which those who have mixed with the right people—lived, in short, in the inner ring—always know each other, let our smash be of the heaviest and completest. I'd back myself to pick such out of the ranks of the army, and think they've better stuff in them than me, who only turned hawk. What you were I've little doubt—a gentleman on the turf, who one knew at Newmarket, Ascot, &c., as long as he payed. The day came when you didn't. You were well known about flash billiard-rooms and in the outer ring for some time after, were then the hero of one or two gross turf frauds, of one or two shameful hoccussing cases at cards and billiards."

"You seem to have been compiling my *dossier* with considerable care," snarled Solano, whose face was now set in a sullen scowl.

"Excuse me, this is entirely supposititious history. Allow me to conclude it in a dozen words—debt, implication in a fraud that either did bring you, or you feared would, and thought it advisable not to wait to ascertain,

within the clutches of the law, the Continent, and there the last polish was put to your education. I have done. You know best whether the picture is correct."

"I think you might write a sensational novel if you tried," rejoined Solano.

"Biography, you mean. Commonplace, though,—not sensational. My own, indeed, would write something like it."

"Very much so; and the writing of biography is not necessarily confined to you."

"Quite so. Only mine finishes tamely comparatively. You see I never came within the compass of the law."

"And how dare you say I did?" asked the other, sharply.

"I certainly shouldn't till I had gathered the facts from Scotland Yard. I should be very particular as to facts," replied Riversley, coolly. "How absurd to be annoyed at an imaginary sketch. Besides, remember this morning's business."

Solano gulped down his wrath fiercely. He felt he had been a fool to let that last observation escape him. It was rarely he let his temper get the better of him, but it was galling to find his quondam pupil his master even in that contemptuous cynicism on which he piqued himself. At last he raised his head, and, looking his host full in the face, said—

"It is time this farce was explained."

"Not altogether a farce," replied Riversley. "I wished to convince you of two things. First, that you levy no black mail from me; try it, and you'll see what comes of it. Secondly, that if you expect help from me, now I have money, it must be as my servant. Of course I am not thinking of anything menial—merely that you carry out what I tell you either in the betting-ring or elsewhere. Think this over. I fancy I shall have call for a man of your stamp; and, if we come to terms, would allow you a fixed salary. Here are three ten-pound notes for old times. Come to lunch at two the day after to-morrow and give me an answer. And now good-night. You had better take one of those weeds to walk home with. Lithfield filled my cigar-case as well as my purse this

afternoon, and he is a judge of tobacco as of all other luxuries of life."

As for Solano, he mutely took the proffered cigar, rose, wished his host good-night, with the addenda that he would be there to lunch on the Thursday, and found himself in the street in a state of bewilderment. As he strolled home to Fusby's he was still amazed to think how utterly he had been beaten by what he would have termed "a young one of his own training." True, Riversley had held all the cards, and, being most thoroughly cognisant of the fact, it was impossible their interview could have terminated otherwise. Yet Solano had dreamt of levying black mail heavily in some shape or other on his former pupil, and felt now, as we all do when those we have taught to play rackets, billiards, &c., beat us for the first time. How slow we are to recognise the fact that we are probably going a little off our play, while the young one we gave unlimited aces or points to is coming on. He gammons with us now, and, if a good-natured lad, lets us win, although quite conscious he could give us points, and we, in our senile vanity, don't see it, but chuckle and trot off with the gratifying reflection that "there's life in the old dog yet." Quite so, but "every dog has his day," and that we have had ours we're slow to recognise.





## CHAPTER XVI.

### MISS MANGERSTON SPEAKS HER MIND.

**T**HE weft of human life is very curious ; I will not say to follow, but merely to look back upon. Let any man of forty or upwards look back upon the days he was three or four and twenty, and call to mind his half-dozen great allies of that epoch—a time at which men for the most have elected their career in life. If possible, let him discover what those six men are now doing, and he will be surprised to find how very differently things have gone with them from what they anticipated. The probability is, that three out of the six are seeking a living in totally different grooves from those in which they originally started, and that out of the remainder, one or two have gone down beneath life's stormy waters—sunk not into the oblivion of the grave perhaps, but into that more terrible oblivion—the Dead Sea of Life. Men and women we never hear of again till two lines in the obituary of the *Times* records their departure from the terrestrial world, to that other still less known world across the Styx.

George Latimer's will has been the means of incorporating the threads of many lives into one woof, and it would have perhaps been better for some one or two of our characters had it never been penned, notably for those who appeared at first most likely to profit thereby.

Miss Clothele and her staff, as Lord Lithfield always

called the Mangerstons, mother and daughter, were once again in Clumbershire. Maude had not met them as yet, but knew that they were staying with Lady Featheringham. It is a glorious September morning, and Miss Clothele and her *l'aide de camp* are wandering about the pleasaunce in front of the house.

"Rather remiss of Mr. Hainton, Caroline, that he has not been over to call on us, don't you think so? He lives no distance off for a man to compass, and he affected great devotion in London, although I have a suspicion it was principally upon Maude Riversley's account."

"Oh, I don't know!" replied Miss Mangerston, quietly. "Mr. Hainton's devotion is a matter of calculation. You were an assistance to him in getting on in society, and, next to dedicating himself to worshipping yourself, it was best to affect adoration of one of your intimates. I don't think Mr. Hainton very likely to lose his head about any woman—not even you, Ethel."

"I'll forgive him that," laughed the heiress. "But, surely, you'll admit he was considerably smitten with Maude Riversley."

"He certainly affected to be, but I was—what shall I say?—well, unfortunate enough to hear Mr. Hainton enumerate his views about women on one occasion, and I'll admit that I don't think Miss Riversley or any one else likely to make a serious impression on that gentleman. My word, Ethel, if I possessed your beauty and attractions, I'd read John Hainton a lesson it should take him a good year to forget, at all events."

"Hush, Caroline," replied Miss Clothele, in no little astonishment at the bitterness with which her friend's concluding sentence had been uttered. "What did he say?"

"I'll not tell you," rejoined the girl, sullenly. "You think well of him, and think perhaps he's serious in his attention to your favourite, Miss Riversley."

"I don't suppose he is engaged to her, but I certainly fancy that he is in earnest."

"You will see. John Hainton in earnest about any woman—not he. He regards us all as puppets. You, with your beauty and reputation as *one* of the belles of the

London world, might turn his head as might any one of your compeers by flattering that keystone of all humanity, his vanity. But, my dear Ethel, I'd give you seven years, and still be bound you hadn't got to his heart."

"You mean we can't get at what don't exist," observed Miss Clothele.

"Just so; and the more I study men the more certain I am that they are more easily influenced through their vanity than through their affections."

The enunciator of this cynical aphorism, we must remember, was deemed somewhat stupid by society generally.

"Hush, Caroline! What quarrel have you with them that you should rail so bitterly against the other sex? Surely, so far you, like myself, have experienced nothing but kindness and courtesy at their hands."

"Yes, but that does not obscure my powers of observation. I don't talk much in society, as you know, Ethel. Society, in its wisdom, thinks me a fool on that account, but I can see if I can't talk. People are kind to me because I am under your protection, and you will have it so. They bow to you. Why? Because, thanks to your beauty, your wealth, and the independence of your character, you are a power in the land. Neither the Pope nor the Czar are autocrats that can bear comparison with a queen of the London world; and you can, to some extent, pass a sentence of ostracism."

"My dear Carrie, I never heard you so bitter before. What can have occurred to steep your soul in gall in this wise? Mr. Hainton has never done anything to awaken your wrath that I know of."

"We base our likes and our dislikes upon very slight foundation, as you know," retorted Miss Mangerston. "I have my own opinion of Mr. Hainton, and, in the interests of my sex, trust to see him receive a sharp lesson ere long."

"What do you mean?" cried Miss Clothele.

"I hope to see him made a fool of by a woman, instead of his making fools of them. Had I half your advantages, I'd revenge my sex on him before many weeks were over."

"I can neither agree with you nor quite understand

you," replied Ethel, quietly. "I think you are mistaken in your view of Mr. Hainton's character, and I fancy Maude Riversley would consider you in error regarding his attentions to herself."

"Ah, has she told you so?"

"Not at all. We have never discussed the matter; but, like you, my dear, I can see, and I'll admit putting a very different interpretation on Mr. Hainton's attentions to yours. I deem him in veritable earnest."

"You do. Suppose I called upon you to test them. No, no, don't mind my idle words—I am talking nonsense. But you do like Maude Riversley, don't you?"

"Yes, certainly. I have not known her very long, but I hope I may reckon her now as one of my intimate friends."

There was a slight contraction of Miss Mangerston's brow, a slight twitch of her mouth as she listened to these words. One might almost have said a slight shiver ran through her whole frame at Ethel's speech. When we recollect the fierce jealous attachment she had for Miss Clothele, it is easy to understand the gall and wormwood this observation was to her. It confirmed her still more in the wild scheme of vengeance floating vaguely through her mind—namely, the effecting of a rupture between John Hainton and Maude Riversley by means of Ethel. She had brooded much over this, and determined that it must be brought about. How, she did not as yet quite know, but that, if satisfactorily brought to pass, the results must be inevitably what she chiefly desired, seemed certain. Vengeance on John Hainton for that slight sin of forgetfulness last year, vengeance, too, on a girl she detested. But far more important still, let the severance between Hainton and Maude be brought about through Ethel's interference, and all intimacy between the two girls was at end also, if she knew anything of the ways of women. Keep a girl really in love from the perpetration of any matrimonial folly, and, whatever her lips may express at the time, do not rely on either gratitude or friendship in the future. The converse is curious. Assist a woman to a husband, and, however bad an egg he may turn out, she will always have a kindly feeling for you. Miss Manger-



ston has, as yet, by no means made up her mind how all this is to be brought about, but she shows already much capability for such machination. Iago was a poisoner on homœopathic principles, and administered his jealousy-globules by slow degrees. Thoroughly awake to this is Caroline Mangerston, and, though with as yet but a vague notion of how her slow poisoning is to be compassed, she has already whispered as much as she dares into Ethel's ear.

Drop a thing persistently and daily into a man's mind from which you derive no visible advantage, and it is very curious how, supposing him to be of only ordinary calibre, it will penetrate his system. Half-a-dozen doses of nitrate of silver have no visible effect on the patient ; persisted in, this medicine makes him turn blue. It took a course of mental poisoning, it may be remembered, before Othello was reduced to a positive green.

Still, all this time the news of Fred Riversley's return has not reached Clumbershire. It is known neither at Clumford Rectory nor by Miss Clothele, albeit she has a somewhat extensive London correspondence. But, one morning, John Hainton turns up at the rectory just in time for luncheon ; and, that meal satisfactorily disposed of, manages to secure a *tête-à-tête* with Maude in the garden. He knows well how Arthur has built up castles in the air that will never now be realised ; and he knows, further, that, with the exception of the girl by his side, the whole family have believed, more or less, in those castles. He has come over to dissolve that dream. He thinks it better that he should break it to them than they should hear it by accident, as they infallibly will before many days are over—likely to be in any paper they take up now.

"Miss Riversley," he said, as he and Maude strolled leisurely down the garden walks, on which the leaves came fluttering stealthily down, as if ashamed of succumbing to that crackle of frost, now becoming characteristic of day-break. "I have got something to say to you."

Maude's heart gave a great jump, and I think an imploring "Oh, don't," trembled on her lips. She thought John Hainton was going to call upon her for a decision on a subject on which her mind was as yet by no means made

up. Not that she was that sort of girl who could not give a man a straight honest answer to a question of this kind, but Maude had not as yet resolved what the answer should be. She did most decidedly wish that John Hainton should not ask her to be his wife at this present—and yet, such is the inconsistency of women on these matters, she could not help feeling a little nettled when he continued—

“Have you heard that Fred Riversley has arrived in London? I had a letter from Town this morning, that tells me it is the talk of all the clubs.”

“And, perhaps, not a whit the truer for being a *canard* of the smoking-rooms,” replied Miss Riversley, with some slight asperity.

Hainton looked at her with some little astonishment—how is it possible for a man to follow the workings of a woman’s mind? how could he surmise that her heart was in a flutter lest he should ask her to be his wife? a question which he lacked courage to put to the test, although he had quite made up his mind that it had to be asked ere long.

“I don’t think you quite understand me,” he resumed, quietly; this is no rumour, but a fact. Fred Riversley is in England this minute, and has been recognised by Lord Lithfield; and he, I believe, knew him well before his exile.”

Her momentary pique was over now, and she recognised how bitter this shattering of his expectations would be to Arthur—disappointment, no doubt, to her parents; but to her brother she knew it would mean not only disappointment, but, probably, difficulties. She had but a moiety of her brother’s confidence, but she could guess the rest, and had little doubt that he had lived of late a good deal on his expectations. She knew that Arthur had University creditors, who were somewhat importunate, before the shadowy inheritance of the Latimer estates had dangled before his eyes. She felt assured that such liabilities had been gathering apace of late.

“You have no doubt about this?” she said, at last. “You feel sure it is not mere rumour; but absolute fact?”

“Absolute fact,” he replied, slowly.

“It is very hard on Arthur. That miserable will has wrought his ruin.”

"How so, Miss Riversley?"

"Oh, can you not see? Speculating on that visionary inheritance, he ceased working, and took to spending. He has done no good whatever in his profession, and I have no doubt"—and here Miss Riversley stopped abruptly.

"No doubt of what?" inquired Hainton.

"Of what! Well, it is a thing I have no business to mention to you, or any one. Please don't ask me, and forget such an expression escaped me."

"I don't wish to intrude upon your confidence, but if you think I can ever be of help, I shall feel only too glad to do your bidding."

She thanked him with a smile, and felt assured that he meant it; but she knew full well that the assistance her brother would probably require, would be money, and that, of course, she could not ask from John Hainton, nor, indeed, any one else that she knew of. Curious, she had never felt ill at ease with her companion before, and yet now, it was with undoubted embarrassment she asked—

"Had he seen anything of Miss Clothele since her arrival in Clumbershire?"

Of course, if anything should have given John Hainton confidence, it was his fair companion's evident nervousness—on the contrary, he caught the infection, and, while thinking that he had never seen Maude look so lovely as she did in her plain muslin dress, with the September sun gilding her bonny brown tresses, instead of asking for the prize on which his heart was set, he faltered forth, "That he had not been over to the Featheringhams as yet." How differently we should play the hand, if it could be played over again—how differently conduct many a conversation or episode in our lives; but a good deal of life, like one's play at the whist-table, affords scant time for reflection—relentless partners or adversaries demand that we shall play—we do, and the wrong card continually.

They paced the walk for a turn or so in silence, and, at last, Maude suggested they should go in. She felt the situation was growing awkward, and women dislike and instinctively put an end to such circumstance, as a rule. Her cavalier mutely assented, remarking, as they turned towards the house, "I met a friend of yours, by the way,

who is staying with the Featheringhams, shooting, last week—Colonel Leslie.”

“Indeed ; I am glad that he is down in this neighbourhood. He is an immense favourite of mine. I look upon him with reverence, mixed with incredulity. It seems so hard to reconcile the quiet, courteous colonel, with the most terrible *sabreur* on the Indian frontier ; and yet I am told it was so, by those who knew ; and that Ralph Leslie was the most daring, tireless cavalry leader we had when the border was ablaze in the North-west ; and I believe the border is pretty generally in that state out there—much like our own marches were here before the union with Scotland. I always regard Colonel Leslie as a ‘belted Will’—the famous Lord Howard, that lived on the border, that figures in Scott’s ‘Lay of the Last Minstrel.’”

If there had been one thing wanting to complete John Hainton’s discomfort, it was this. He had felt jealous of Colonel Leslie’s intimacy with Maude, in London, and this rather inflated speech of hers fanned the dying embers with a vengeance. Miss Riversley had no need to apprehend a crisis that afternoon, and she and the Squire of Enderly parted in friendly, but ordinary fashion.





## CHAPTER XVII.

### “THE RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL.”

**H**OPE deferred may make the heart sick, but hope deferred, unexpectedly realised, is wont to produce a species of moral intoxication. Fred Riversley had not communicated with his father until after that final interview with Mr. Prossiter, at which he had been recognised by Lord Lithfield. Then he wrote to Sir John and informed him he should be at Bunnington in a few hours, in short, as soon as he could complete the necessary steps for entering upon his inheritance. It was long since Sir John had been so roused about anything. It was his custom now to croak away his days over the fire and the papers, or, in the early autumn-time, to sit at the open window of his study, which looked over the broken park-land. Somewhat querulous and sarcastic he was to those about him, as might be looked for in one, bankrupt in health and wealth, and whose best hope in life could only be, that the hour-glass was turned for the last time. We are most of us loth to hear that our hours are numbered, and cling to this world, little pleasure as there may appear left for us in it. We fear to embark upon the unknown, even when the sleep that knows no waking should look like rest from fighting the stormy billows that surround us.

To Sir John, the news that his son was alive and once more in England, acted like a draught of the elixir of life.

He had once more something to live for—to see Fred, and to see Fred, with the assistance of his newly-acquired property, redeem the Bunnington lands from the fierce grasp of the usurers was, he felt, worth living for; otherwise, he had been of late, like many another old Pagan of his own stamp, half wishing that the boredom of existence might cease for him. When age and ill-health debar such men indulgence in their former pleasures, life seems for them to have lost its savour.

Sir John fretted and fidgeted after the fashion of a querulous invalid, whose whole interest was thoroughly absorbed in one object. He was in a fever about the post, quite an hour before it was due; he apparently expected supplementary posts at unrecognised periods, while the grooms became veritable couriers, and the contents of the stables posters, so continually were they dispatched in wild search of problematical telegrams. The world of the confirmed invalid is so circumscribed that it is little wonder an object of interest is apt to absorb his entire faculties. The old man thinks of nothing else; Bunnington Park and the Bunnington acres are, after all, not to pass away from his line, nor the Riversleys to be erased from the roll of country gentlemen in Hertfordshire. Aye, Fred will serve his time as sheriff, after all, and if he will only marry judiciously, which means a girl with money, might hunt the country again in days to come. He's old enough to prefer solids to sweets; shares, securities, and the three per cents. to a pretty face; and as for a fashionable beauty, who owes her tresses and complexion to her coiffeur, and her figure to her dressmaker, he must surely be case-hardened against their toils. Let me see, Fred's thirty-four, and has bought his experiences, pretty dearly too, poor boy, these latter years, I am afraid. However, he's come round at last, and landed the big stake, for which I made so many fatal essays, as Newmarket and Homburg can testify.

Forty-eight hours of feverish impatience, and the welcome yellow tissue, having, it is needless to say, eluded the vigilance of the groom on vedette duty, is put into the Baronet's hands; they shake a little as he opens it, and reads that Fred will be with him to dinner. A

worldly, though thoroughly good-natured, father he has been hitherto, never able to do much for his son, owing to the hot revels he had held in his wild youth, but he would have shared the property honestly with his heir had he not unluckily gone through it before Fred had left Eton. It was not until his infirmities left him, but the retrospect of life, that he felt twinges of remorse at having laid low the family *tree*, and improved the Riversleys off the roll of English landed gentry. How Sir John fussed about for the next few hours let his servitors testify. He hobbled across to his son's room—it was the one he had occupied from a boy—to see that everything was prepared half-a-dozen times, and again, and again, was the housekeeper summoned and cross-examined in minor details. Mrs. Broadsley had witnessed the Captain's coming of age, and, like all the old servants who had previously known him, was somewhat excited herself about the return of the prodigal. He had been freehanded, as most such spend-thrifts are, but he had ever besides a bright smile and cheering word for those who waited on him. That Master Fred should be popular in the stables was but natural. He could cross a country or make anything in reason travel in harness. That he should be popular with the female domestics was also natural: a good-looking fellow, with a jest, if not something more, always ready on his lips, was certain of their sympathies; even the old keeper began to call to mind, and chuckle over, some of Master Fred's feats with the breech-loader. In short, Sir John and all his retainers were with ear a-prick for the wheels of the absentee's chariot.

The Baronet had always been fond of his boy: he had laughed at his youthful conceits and extravagances; but it was not till poor Fred was dipped past redemption that his father had really instructed him in the mere hollowness of their holding. It was not till he appealed to him for help that Sir John sadly explained that Bunnington was really no longer theirs. He had been told to look for no further help beyond his allowance when he joined the Guards; but so had most of his comrades, and the major part of them practically tested how far that warning was true before two or three years had rolled over their heads,

Fred Riversley had seen it turn out so often a monition without consequences ; a barometer, the indications of which were quite unreliable ; on which stormy merely meant breezy weather, that it was little wonder he deemed the Bunnington glass set in similar fashion. He knew his father had lived a very fast life in his day, and was not logician enough to understand that, from the premises of a spendthrift sire and unentailed estate, the deduction was unmistakable pauperism for the next in succession. I don't know, with his bringing up, that this knowledge would have made much difference ; to Fred Riversley, launched upon town in the way he was, probably not, but still he did not know it till the crash had come. Let this fact stand recorded in favour of a man of whom there is little to put upon the credit side of his ledger, and give him the benefit of believing that, knowing the truth, he would have set his shoulder to the wheel, and worked hard in some shape for the redemption of the family home and acres. He has come by the scratch of a pen into a fortune which, strive as he might, it is little likely he would have made in these few years ; we shall see now what he proposes to do with it.

The gates are wide open, and the lodge-keeper and his wife all agape at the Park entrance as the carriage wheels in, and a dark care-worn face carelessly acknowledges the beaming smiles and salutations of the worthy couple.

"The troubles and the furrin parts have spoilt him," said the woman, as she turned disappointed to her husband. "He never passed the gates on coming home without a smile and a joke for Peggy."

"The sunshine's all out of his face," returned her husband, "and his eyes dreadful. He ain't himself, old lady, or he'd never have forgot to ask me whether I'd got over the taking of the wasp nest. But Bunnington 'll bring him round, no fear."

If there had been excitement at the lodge, you may depend upon it there was still more at the house. Not a retainer of the establishment but contrived to be in the way under some pretext or another : the old servants to welcome their young master back, the new to see this gay soldier of whom they had heard so much. The last



enlisted housemaid in the smartest ribbons she thought Mrs. Broadsley would tolerate, was peeping over the banisters as breathless with expectation as the old keeper who lounges prominently before the shrubbery in hope of recognition.

A chill ran through the whole of these good people as Fred Riversley passed with impassive face through their midst to his father's room; to the housekeeper only did he vouch recognition, he shook hands with her, briefly complimented her on wearing well, and passed the remainder without notice. As Mrs. Broadsley confidentially told the butler at her own table, that evening—he was a new official since the Captain's exodus: "Not the Mister Fred we sent abroad, Mr. Tunbottle. No, no! He would have had his joke. 'Growing younger and younger, Mrs. Broadsley, you'll get back to your cradle before I get to my coffin, I'll go bail.' He'd always something saucy to say to me."

Poor old Sir John met his son in the doorway, and the first sign of emotion that escaped Fred Riversley was visible then. Broken, cynical bandit as he now was, unmoved as he had returned the greetings of all the old servitors who remembered him from boyhood, he was touched at the change these eight years had wrought in his father. He had left him a hale, elderly gentleman, taking his shooting and hunting easily, cursing the gout, and grumbling that doctors restricted him at times somewhat in the matter of claret, but still enjoying the society of his neighbours and friends. He met him now a broken-down, decrepit, old man, trembling between gout and paralysis, and, though he had this as yet to learn, a recluse.

In their own worldly fashion these two had loved each other well. Fred Riversley had often felt proud as some bygone story of his father's reckless escapades had come to his ears in the beginning of his London career. It may not be right in the eyes of the moralist, but it happens to be nature, a force that so constantly upsets the views and designs of her reformers, that men will take a certain pride in being connected with those who have made the town ring with their folly and excesses; while,

on the other hand, that their progenitors should chuckle and mutter, "a chip of the old block, sir," over the delinquencies of their children is an equally common case. Sinners turn saints at times, and exact puritanical views and conduct from their descendants, it is true, but the result is usually not attended with much success.

The close grip of the hand, and the somewhat guttural, "How are you?" with which we meet, according to our insular custom, after many years' separation, and the pair sat down. Poor old Sir John, he quite shook with excitement; he would have felt somewhat ashamed of himself some ten years ago; it was as contrary to the canons of his world to betray emotion, as it is amongst the Turks, or the Indians of the American prairie; but he is old and feeble now, and no longer equal to controlling his feelings.

"My coming home is a little too much for you, father; let me ring the bell, a glass of wine will do you good."

"Yes, Fred, I am weak, you know; very stupid of me, but I am, and then, boy, it is so long since I saw you; but it must be brandy, Fred. Alas! my wine-bibbing days are over: brandy-and-water is all the doctors allow me, now."

That the bell was attended to with marvellous celerity need scarcely be said. A household all agog with curiosity, was it likely a chance of gratifying that thirst by even momentarily gaping at the returned hero, would be missed? No, nothing but the strict etiquette of a well-ordered household prevented quite a skirmish anent whose privilege it might be to answer that summons. It was quashed peremptorily by the announcement that Mr. Tunbottle meant to waive his rank for once, and condescend to see "what was up" himself.

Mr. Tunbottle entered the room with the intention of making a little speech, if opportunity served, about how delighted the whole household were at Captain Riversley's return, and then diverging into as much irrelevant gossip as might seem possible. That dignified servitor's benignant smile was not a little disturbed by the curt answer to his bland—"Did you ring, sir?"

"Of course I did, and dev'lish slow you've been about attending to it. Get some brandy-and-water—you know

what my father usually takes—and look sharp about it. I want a glass of the old brown sherry for myself afterwards, but be quick with the brandy, d’ye hear?”

“Yes, sir,” replied the disconcerted butler. And it may be safely said that Mr. Tunbottle, to speak figuratively, retired to his own domain with the starch more completely taken out of him than had been his fate since assuming office at Bunnington. Butler to a broken, careless man, like Sir John, was, as may be imagined, a lucrative sinecure; the wine in the housekeeper’s room was celebrated through all flunkeydom in the county.

But Mr. Tunbottle was much too good a judge to thwart the heir apparent until he had fully considered the case, so that he reappeared with the required refreshment in a very few minutes, and performed his duties in strictest silence. He relieved his feelings in the housekeeper’s room later on, by observing—

“No, Mrs. Broadsley, I’m disapinted, he ain’t the fine open-hearted young gentleman I’ve been given to expect; older, ma’am, than I thought to see, and not free from a vice of old age—suspicion. Then his manners, ma’am, are not what *we* are accustomed to. I can make allowances for the wretched society he’s lived along with of late years, and he needs it, I assure you. Why, he spoke to *me*, who have always associated with the aristocracy, as if he was a millowner, and I a factory hand.”

In short, there was disappointment generally through the Bunnington household about the manner in which the restored prince had responded to the greetings of his adherents. No descendant of the Stuarts could have displayed more splendid oblivion of past services than Fred Riversley; except Mrs. Broadsley, he had not deigned to take the slightest notice of any one of the old servants. He had no word for the old keeper, or the old tenants, and seemed perfectly indifferent to the shooting prospects, about which, in days of old, he’d even been keenly interested.

When old Breakham, the head-keeper, came up officially the morning after the Captain’s return, and sent in word by Mr. Tunbottle that he’d like to see Mr. Frederick for a few minutes, the butler came back with an intimation that

Mr. Frederick was busy now, but would see him before the 1st.

"He just smokes cigarettes and reads those yellow French books all day, that's what he does, sir," observed Mr. Tunbottle, in friendly comment.

"And if I might be permitted to permeate an opinion (a little given to fine, though not appropriate, language), Mr. Tunbottle, I should say the Captain was bored."

"Yes, Mr. Breakham, he's bored, and don't mean a stay."

To poor Sir John his son's visit brought bitter disappointment; the frank, reckless young fellow who had gone such a hopeless smash, and then fled to the Continent, had never returned; this cool, cynical, sharp-tongued man-of-the-world bore no resemblance to the bright boy he had lost. Fred Riversley was respectful and attentive to him, but there was no wring in it all—no warmth in his conversation—while his obvious indifference when the Baronet commenced harping on his pet string, the involvements of Bunnington, troubled Sir John sorely.

It was the third evening after his arrival, as Fred and his father sat over their wine after dinner, that the Baronet opened his heart.

"I think you'd best begin with that mortgage of Gaper's, Fred; we pay five per cent. on that, and that's stiff interest, as things go. It'll take you some years' careful management to redeem the old place; but, thank God, you've come back, and with the means to do it. I little thought poor George Latimer would ever do us such a turn; but I shall die now with the satisfaction of knowing that I leave a Riversley behind me at Bunnington; and, Fred, you've sown your wild oats now. You've not made such a fool of yourself as your father did, eh?" and the old man looked nervously across to his son.

"No," rejoined that gentleman, slowly. "Seven years' penal servitude don't reform wrongdoers sometimes. I'll tell you why, in the main because they don't get a fresh start in life. I've had better luck. I've served my time, gained my experiences, and am in a far better position than I ever was before. No, you needn't be afraid of my making a fool of myself again."

"And when shall you set about clearing the estate, Fred?"

"My dear father, I don't want to extinguish your hopes, but my own opinion is, that the estate is dipped past redemption. I have waded through some of those papers you have called my attention to since my return, and I have come to that conclusion. Now, I tell you fairly, I'm not going to jeopardize the comfortable income I have inherited by attempting the impossible."

"But, Fred, you would never let the old place go! With all the money you have come into, you could surely make some sort of terms. Think of the Riversleys blotted out from the landed gentry of Hertfordshire! think of Bunnington in the hands of some d——d City fellow!"

"I don't want to hurt your feelings, father, but I tell you fairly, I'm not going to sacrifice my present position for any sentiment about the old family place. I've had the sentiment knocked pretty well out of me of late. It would take pretty well double my inheritance to clear Bunnington, and I'd rather stand clear with the world, as I do now, than be lord here, still heavily mortgaged."

"Fred! Fred! You can't mean it; say you don't mean it," rejoined the old man, hoarsely.

"But I do mean it. Bunnington must go to the hammer at your death. You can't accuse me of having much hand in it. You and my grandfather left me little chance. You had disposed of pretty well everything before I was of age; and as long as I don't complain, I can't see you have any cause to."

It was true, terribly true, and passing over the sentiment for the old home, Fred was no doubt wise in his decision, but he might have broken it to his father less cynically.

The old man gave a slight shiver, and looked at him almost imploringly.

"No," continued Fred, "you've had the spending of Bunnington, and have no cause for complaint because I don't want to buy the property now it's in the market. A country seat, to my mind, is a confounded nuisance, entailing all sorts of expenses and disagreeable ties. If you want to shoot, hire a moor; if to hunt, take a hunting-box; but the sole permanent home for a man of the world

is a house in London. No, let Bunnington go; whoever buys it will get very indifferent interest for his money.”

He was ill, ruined, and feeble now, but this last sneer at the family seat made the old *roué* pull himself together. He drew himself up, and it was with all the hauteur of early days that the Baronet replied—

“Latimer made one slight oversight in his will. It was a pity he did not insist upon a change of name as a condition of your inheritance. You’re right, I don’t think Bunnington Park would suit you.”

Sir John met his son next morning with the most stately politeness, and this frigid courtesy continued between the pair during the day. Fred made no sort of effort to pacify his father’s obvious indignation, but quietly announced his return to town, a thing duly carried into execution the succeeding morning. The Baronet made no effort to detain him, but Mr. Tunbottle gave it as his opinion, in the housekeeper’s room that evening, “the Captain had squeezed the life pretty well out of him.”

“I don’t know what the row was, ma’am, but Sir John, who was in such a twitter to see Mr. Fred, don’t look like wanting to see him again. The news of his son’s coming back made him reg’lar flicker up, but he looks like following materially after the order of flickers, and going out pretty shortly. It’s a fact, Mrs. Broadsley; just judge for yourself to-morrow, ma’am. He’s had a shock, and he ain’t equal to shocks. No, shocks late in life is dangerous;” and Mr. Tunbottle wagged his head with much sagacity.





## CHAPTER XVIII.

### ARTHUR'S DREAM DISPELLED.

**A**RTHUR RIVERSLEY, returning from a pleasant lawn-tennis party, held at the barracks, in Clumford, entered the rectory in the highest of spirits and the neatest suit of flannels yet seen in those parts. In the hall he ran across his sister Maude, on her way upstairs to dress for dinner.

"Pity you couldn't come with me," he exclaimed. "It was a capital party; very well done, and you would have enjoyed it."

"No doubt; but I have something to say to you, Arthur. John Hainton has been here to-day."

"Well, I've no doubt you've passed a pleasant afternoon; and am I to go further, and offer congratulations, Maude?" said the young man, laughing.

"Don't be absurd," she replied, tartly; some recollection of those unspoken, though expected, words flashing across her memory. "He brought some news. Bad, very bad; but important for you to know."

The colour died out of Arthur Riversley's cheeks, as he muttered, "It was no news of Fred, was it?"

"Yes," said Maude, gently. "Fred is not only in London, but has been recognised by Lord Lithfield, and one or two more. From what Mr. Hainton told me, there is no doubt about its being Fred, in genuine earnest."

"It's hard, deuced hard, upon me," said Arthur,

hoarsely. "He had no business to make a mystery of his whereabouts, pretend to be dead, and raise up false expectations in others. I think he has behaved infamously—with no consideration for his father, or any of his relations."

"Hush, hush," said Maude. "I was afraid it would be hard upon you, in many ways. I am afraid you have built too much upon this inheritance, and neither worked so hard nor been so prudent as you ought."

"It is no use talking about that now," he rejoined, irritably. "I feel no doubt about my relations recalling to my mind that I've spilled the milk. One's friends and family never neglect expatiating on the mess we've made of it."

"I didn't mean to annoy you, Arthur; but was it not better you should learn this from my lips, sooner than those of a stranger?" she rejoined, softly.

"Yes. I'm put rather in a hole, and can't help being upset about it. You're a good little girl, I believe. Don't bother me any more about it, now. Let the others know—if they don't already—and make Bessie understand this is no subject for her flippancy."

And then Arthur Riversley dashed upstairs to hide the bitterness of his disappointment from all eyes.

He threw himself into an easy chair, and began to muse over this complete upset of all his dreams and calculations. That airy Spanish castle he had conjured up so persistently, laid levelled to its filmy foundations. Fred home again! What was Latimer's will to him now? What chance had he of ever inheriting the baronetcy? An event postponed to the Greek Kalends that; and then he began gravely to speculate on the desperate change this made in his prospects. Arthur Riversley, a struggling barrister, with no inclination to work, living on a limited allowance, vouchsafed him by his father, was a very different man from Arthur Riversley, heir to five thousand a year, and a baronetcy. Then he looked ruefully back over what this year had done for him. He hardly liked to think much about that. To have imbibed a taste for extravagance, a distaste for work, and to have accumulated a tolerable incubus of debt, was not a healthy start in a legal career. And yet Arthur dimly recognised all this.



He was one of those weak, but imaginative natures, that suffer agonies of remorse in their hours of tribulation—who see more clearly than their sternest mentor can point out, the madness, the folly of their conduct; but who are perfectly incapable of stemming the tide. They drift, as a rule, slowly but steadily into unknown waters, and never reach either bank or harbour of refuge. Miserables, too, who hardly enjoy their short butterfly career, ever conscience-stricken, ever oppressed with the knowledge that they are sipping unprofitable sweets instead of gathering honey. *Væ victis!* for the fate of these unfortunates is sad to reflect upon.

Arthur dressed gloomily for dinner that evening. There was no immediate unpleasantness to be apprehended, but he felt there were breakers ahead, and that the ensuing year would be fraught with trouble and annoyances. Dinner was not an inspiring entertainment—evident, very, that all the family were quite aware of his dethronement. Sympathy on the part of the ladies; a curious but latent disposition on the part of the rector to view him in the light of an impostor; and, truth to tell, the Rev. Mortimer was very sore at the news John Hainton had brought; while even the servants, at least so Arthur thought in his morbid state of mind, were watching, with keen enjoyment, how the deposed Prince carried himself. It is so with the majority of us; we lower our crests and show ruin in our faces, when it comes to us, instead of striving to emulate the jaunty few, who meet the crash with a smile on their lips and a flower in their buttonhole. The evidence does not matter a tittle. When a man meets his fate in the latter fashion, the world never will believe his difficulties are more than temporary. Clothe yourself in sackcloth and ashes, and they are prepared to believe, not only that you have lost all your money, but that you have added larceny, arson, and murder to the sum of your iniquities.

Arthur had no heart for a *tête-à-tête* with his father after dinner, and, under the plea of headache, made his escape from the dining-room on the heels of the ladies. He went out upon the terrace, and, lighting a cigar, began to pace moodily up and down, and meditate upon his future pros-

pects. He had not been there long before Maude glided to his side.

"Don't be angry with me, Arthur," she pleaded; "but I want to comfort you, if I may. We all recognise how severe a disappointment this must be to you. It is that to papa and mamma; but of course it presses harder upon you than any one."

"Naturally it does. It is I who have to bear the consequences. You must own it is rough upon a fellow, Maude, who has been brought up as heir to a goodish property, to suddenly find himself a pauper."

She took no notice of the wretched sophistry. She knew he was in difficulties before he left Oxford, or even dreamed of inheriting the Latimer estates, and she made little doubt that he had considerably increased his liabilities during the last year.

"I am sorry, so sorry for you. Is it very bad, Arthur?"

"What do you mean by *it*?" he asked, sharply.

"Don't be angry; but you told me you were in debt some time since. I suppose it is worse now?"

"Naturally. I've not been so bad as most fellows, who would have raised a lot of money on their prospects; but a man with good expectations isn't called upon to be so careful as a man who has none."

She thought of the day when she had first heard of it, and told him it was a "will-o'-the-wisp" inheritance; but all she said was, "Are things very pressing?"

"No; not likely to be for some months," he replied.

"And what will you do, then?"

"I've not thought, as yet; but surely Fred will be bound to do something. He ought to feel how bitter the disappointment is for me."

"Arthur, have you lost your head? how can you urge it in that light? You seem to expect that Fred will repent that he is not dead and you reigning in his stead."

"Pooh!" he rejoined, testily, "I don't mean that, of course; but he must see it is hard upon me."

"Oh! Arthur, dear," said Maude, vehemently; "don't build upon that. Whatever your scrape is, look it fairly in the face. Papa may scold, but he will see you through it. Make a clean breast to him when the time comes. It

won't be pleasant, I know—such confessions never are ; but it will be surely as easy as asking a cousin you hardly know, to pay your debts.”

“ But I have a claim upon him,” rejoined her brother, doggedly.

“ What ? what ? Simply that for twelve months you believed him to be dead, and thought you might succeed to his inheritance ? How could you ever advance anything so preposterous ? The mention of such a claim would be simply to invite cynical or angry rejoinder.”

“ If you will persist in putting things in that coarse fashion, it is useless to argue,” returned Arthur, sulkily.

“ Call it coarse, if you like, but I want you to see things as they are,” said Maude. “ Fred has the character of being free-hearted and generous ; it is possible he might volunteer to do something for you ; but to ask him, remember, is to humiliate yourself.”

“ Women never understand these things ; and perhaps, Maude, you will abstain from volunteering your advice in future.”

It was useless to say more, so she left him to his reflections.

He walked up and down smoking and still musing on the alteration in his position. He was just about starting on a round of country visits. How would they treat him at Barnsborow Castle ? What welcome would Miss Clothele, Lord Lithfield, and all that set accord him ? Would Lady Featheringham drop him or not ? These, and a lot of similar petty social questions, occupied his mind even now much more than the fact that he was, to speak metaphorically, with his back to the wall, and no way out of that position save by fighting the battle of life in real earnest. Not the stuff this of which gladiators are made. The men who do battle with the world are made of more granite-like material.

The idea may perhaps be deemed preposterous that Arthur Riversley and his relations should have, for the most part, so blindly worked themselves into the belief of Fred Riversley's death. My experience teaches me otherwise. There is nothing people are so credulous about as the inheritance of property. Tell them it is left to them

under certain contingencies, and they immediately ignore the contingencies, while they will build up expectations upon the most shadowy grounds. Hazlitt tells an amusing story in his "Table Talk" *à propos* to this. A man, so notorious for his romancing tendencies that nobody ever dreamed of giving him credence in life, died and left a will bequeathing jewelry, stocks, shares, and cash in the bank amongst his numerous friends and relations. These people were utterly incredulous that his last will and testament would prove in beautiful accordance with the tenour of his life, and the property enumerated be utterly fabulous. No getting those legatees to believe for some time that these stocks, shares, &c., were the last outcome of a magnificent imagination which had failed to adopt novel writing as a safety valve.

There were not at this time of year, as may be supposed, many of his intimates or even of his acquaintances left in town. Still, to the few there were, Fred Riversley was a riddle hard to understand. They were prepared to welcome him back openhanded, but he did not respond at all in similar fashion. He accepted invitations to dinner, made his way as far as possible at present into his old haunts; but the remark, "By Jove, Riversley is a deuced different fellow from what he was!" is ever on men's lips. The gay, reckless, light-hearted Guardsman is a shrewd, cynical, reticent man of the world now, willing to receive hospitality apparently, but much more chary of dinner-giving now that he is a man of property than when he was a broken spendthrift overburdened with debt. His settlement with his old creditors—more especially the money-lenders—was marked by an astuteness that made even his old confederate, and now established confidential manager, Solano stare. Hard, indeed, were the terms he dictated to the children of Israel. They got their money back, of course, but it was accompanied with interest calculated at moderate rate, and bearing no compound complications. They grumbled, but they took it, preferring a compromise to the expense and uncertainty of resorting to the law for assistance. Courts of Justice have never been inclined to favour the usurer from Shylock's time even unto our own.

But, if there was one man who viewed Captain Riversley's

proceedings with unmitigated astonishment, it was Mr. Prossiter. That gentleman had naturally seen and heard a good deal of George Latimer's heir in putting him into possession of his inheritance. He was much surprised to find the reckless spendthrift had developed into an astute and hard-headed man of business; still he rather, as one may suppose, admired the Captain in this unsuspected capacity. What Mr. Prossiter could not get over was, that Fred Riversley should have retained Solano as his right-hand man. It was Solano who bought wines and horses for him, and evidently chiefly managed his affairs.

"Why?" asked Mr. Prossiter of himself, tapping his teeth with his eyeglasses. "He knows that man to be an out-and-out scoundrel. Solano's attempt to personate him would alone prove that, but Sir Frederick was evidently quite aware of it before. I suppose he's useful to him in some of his betting transactions, for I've a suspicion he is dabbling on the turf again. I can only say, if he shows half the astuteness there he has displayed in business details here, the book-makers will find his money a good deal harder to come by than it was in days of yore. Solano, however, is a mystery. He ought to be doing penal servitude, and is apparently the bosom friend of the prosecutor that should have been. I have heard of transforming a confirmed poacher into a gamekeeper, but I never heard of a banker who had ventured on the bold experiment of appointing a practised burglar his cashier."





## CHAPTER XIX.

### AT BARNSBOROW CASTLE.

**A** VERY few days after John Hainton's communication saw Maude and her brother on their way to Barnsborow Castle. Arthur knew he would there meet Miss Clothele and divers London people, and had little doubt of their being quite aware that his cousin had reappeared and claimed his inheritance.

"It is well to have the thing settled at once, Maude, and so I don't mind being your escort; but I dare say a good many of our London friends will next door to cut me now."

"You will find yourself quite wrong. They will receive you exactly the same as ever. Forgive me, my brother, but you always attached a great deal more importance to that shadowy contingency than other people did. It perhaps gave you some slight start in society, but I fancy Ethel Clothele did a good deal more for you."

"Why?" rejoined her brother. "I'm sure you told me plainly enough in town——"

"Hush, and don't run away with nonsensical ideas. I only mean that Ethel is a power in the London world, and exercised her power with great kindness in behalf of her friend and her friend's brother."

Arthur Riversley relapsed into silence. This was looking at things in a light from which he had never regarded them, and it would have roused considerable indignation

on his part had not his *Château d'Espagne* been already crumbled in the dust.

Maude proved perfectly right in her anticipations. Irritable and jealously alive to a slight as Arthur Riversley was, even he was constrained to allow that nothing could be more cordial than his welcome from every one assembled at Barnsborow Castle. Colonel Lesue, notwithstanding he had never been particularly cordial, now gave him a hearty hand grip. The Colonel might not be possessed of the wisdom of cities, but he was a monstrous keen judge of what he designated "a man." I don't think he would have quite placed Arthur Riversley in that category, for he had read him pretty correctly, but he felt that this must be a sore disappointment to him, and wondered whether he would now buckle to, face life as a problem which he had to solve by hard work, and show that he had stuff in him after all.

"You must let me carry off Maude!" exclaimed Ethel to her hostess, with a gay smile. "I assure you we shall neither of us be of any benefit to society till we have had an hour's unrestrained gossip. You know young women's weakness when they call themselves friends, so of course we have lots of secrets and scandal to exchange."

"Go along with you," cried her ladyship, laughing. "Ring for tea when you want it, Ethel, and only mind you get your malicious confidences satisfactorily concluded before dinner-time. I expect you to be your bonnie selves again by then, remember."

Ethel gave her hostess a laughing nod, and then bore Maude off to her own room.

"Well," she said, after seating her visitor in a large arm-chair, "what news have you for me? When is it to be?"

"I don't understand you!" cried Maude, blushing in a manner that showed she did perfectly, nevertheless.

"Oh, yes you do, my dear," rejoined Ethel, laughing. "Has John Hainton disburthened his heart yet? When am I to buy you the prettiest bangle in all London? Speak, and don't keep fencing with my question, or pretending you do not understand me."

"I won't do that. But, Ethel, John Hainton is no more

to me than any other man," and Maude's lips twitched, and the colour rather faded from her cheeks as she spoke.

Miss Clothel eyed her keenly for a moment, then, passing her arm round her, whispered—

"Forgive me; I did not mean to pain you, but Mr. Hainton had given your friends good grounds to suppose that he intended to ask you a question which apparently he has not yet nerved himself to do. But I don't think, if you've any feeling for him, you need feel uneasy, Maude. He's coming to stay here this week, and I'll hold you a dozen pair of gloves you've had the refusal of Enderly Park before his visit's over."

"Don't tease, Ethel," was Maude's reply. "You've, of course, heard that my cousin Frederick has turned up?"

"Oh, yes; Colonel Leslie brought the news down with him. It is very hard on your brother."

"It is, I admit, but it really ought not to be. Arthur knew what a shadowy chance his was from the outset, only unluckily everybody bolstered him up in the delusion that he must inherit that property; because Fred could not be found at once, they jumped at the conclusion that he could not be found at all. The bubble has burst at last, and Arthur naturally feels a little sore as he reflects upon his folly."

"I cannot call him so very foolish," replied Ethel, slowly. "I, like many others, certainly thought Captain Riversley would never be heard of again."

"But why should you all think so? Fred disappeared because he was ruined; to such a waif as he doubtless became, the news of his good fortune would come slowly. Still it was absurd to conclude he was not, because he was hard to find. Arthur, as I have already told you, will be the great sufferer, and verily Mr. Latimer has done him much evil. He has encouraged an indolent young man in his indolence, and instilled into him that his bread was provided for him ready buttered; the fact being, of course, that he has to earn his butter."

"I understand," replied Ethel, thoughtfully, "but surely there can be no great harm done; it is, at all events, only a year thrown away"

Miss Riversley shook her head; she knew her brother



well, and felt that in his case a year's idleness would make work come very difficult to him.

When they descended to dinner, they found their hostess in no little perturbation. "I am so sorry," she exclaimed, "I have really got hardly enough cavaliers as it is for all you young ladies; and here is a note just arrived from Mr. Hainton to say that unexpected business has suddenly called him abroad; he consequently, therefore, regrets, &c., that he cannot come to me."

"It is curious," said Miss Mangerston to Maude, who happened to be next her, "but 'important business' always *does* carry men off in other directions when they wish to evade an engagement."

"But why," said Ethel, who overheard her remark, "should you think that Mr. Hainton wishes to avoid a visit to Barnsborow Castle?"

Miss Mangerston merely shrugged her shoulders, and muttered something about men being extremely changeable. Her observation had been made with the amiable intention of conveying to Maude that John Hainton avoided Barnsborow from disinclination to meet her. Miss Mangerston was a good hater, and slight as was the cause of John Hainton's offending, had never in the least agreed to condone that slip of memory at the Enderly dance. If she could traverse the path of his love affair, she determined to do so. She did not particularly like Maude—in fact, though careful not to show it, Miss Mangerston disliked all Ethel's friends; if she could have had her own way, Miss Clothele would have had no other friend but herself.

After dinner, Arthur found himself seated next to Ralph Leslie. The Colonel alluded at once to the reappearance of Fred Riversley. "It made quite a sensation," he observed, "in the London world; he had been sought so long in vain, that I think we had all quite arrived at the conclusion that he would never be heard of again. From what Lithfield once told me, it makes a serious difference to your prospects."

"Yes," rejoined Arthur, curtly, "my inheritance disappears as if it had been invested in a bubble company."

The Colonel rather opened his eyes at this; it was

difficult for the hard practical soldier to realise how completely Arthur Riversley had regarded himself as George Latimer's heir. The young man had even gone so far as to feel aggrieved that seven years had yet to elapse before he took possession of his property. But little more than twelve months ago he had hardly heard of George Latimer, and most assuredly that he could by any possibility be a penny the better or worse for his death, was a thing that had never occurred to him. He really did feel as if he had actually had and had now lost a largish property.

"Well," said the Colonel, "as it was not to come to you, it is well the golden bait was dangled before your eyes no longer. Expectations are always bad things to rely upon, and yet there are very few of us can help doing so to some extent. The delusion in your case, as it was to be dispelled, is dispelled in good time; you will have to throw yourself into the collar now, I presume."

"Yes," said Arthur, "I suppose I must dedicate my time and energies to 'Coke on Littleton.' The acquisition of law can only be described as a beastly 'grind.'"

"I dare say it is," observed the Colonel, laughing; "but I fancy the rudiments of most trades don't interest us much in the acquirement. I can recollect, a good many years ago, experiencing your sentiments with regard to the 'goose-step;' but you have one pull over us, success in your profession means money, and we get high up the tree without gathering much of that."

In the drawing-room, meanwhile, quite an animated discussion was being carried on concerning Mr. Hainton's sudden departure. Her ladyship had seen him only two or three days before, and far from hinting at any such possibility, he had bidden her good-bye till dinner-time on this day. What could have called him so unexpectedly away? Mr. Hainton was not a man whose business ever called him much outside his own county. He took his three months in town every year, seeing the season conscientiously through, from Easter to Goodwood. He went away to divers houses in other counties to slay partridges and pheasants; or for country balls. But business calling him abroad was an incident that none of the fair commen-

tators on his excuse could ever call to mind as having befallen him.

It may be absurd and unwarrantable, but departure from our usual grooves is always viewed with surprise, much curiosity, and some slight suspicion by our intimates. If you could but try it, my friend, and listen to the comments of your habitual associates concerning you, I fancy you would admit the most right-minded amongst us would be taken aback. Our intimates can be at times, oh, so nice on these occasions.

"Gone abroad suddenly, dear me; who with?" "Sailed to America, has he? I always thought he could never last at the pace he was going; bad business, I suppose." Such are the flying commentaries absence from our accustomed haunts is wont to evoke from those with whom we habitually live. Of course, I am not speaking of our domestic circle, or those in possession of our entire confidence; and yet even to them these sudden foreign excursions are at times supplemented by startling revelations. Miss Mangerston saw her opportunity, and day by day she trickled her insinuations with consummate tact into the ears of the guests at Barnsborow. She showed a dexterity in so doing almost devilish, when we remember how exceeding slight had been the provocation she had received, and what constituted the extreme danger of her malicious accusations was their vagueness and variety. Much too clever to give any direct reason for John Hainton's mysterious disappearance, she hinted at a dozen. In the strictest confidence she confided to Colonel Leslie and others that she had heard it was the result of an unfortunate intimacy with a married lady at Brighton; to Lady Prosonbore she averred that Mr. Hainton had been involved in some unfortunate speculations; but to Ethel she adhered steadily to her old story, namely, that John Hainton was a man who was always engaged in a desperate flirtation with some girl or other, and that he had shirked his visit to Barnsborow simply because he had gone so far with Maude Riversley, that he felt a week with her in a country house must bring things to a crisis. Sparingly and cautiously she would occasionally drop some observation to this effect before Maude,

but Miss Mangerston was homœopathic in the administration of her poisons, and held the dispenser of fierce drastics as a practitioner beyond contempt, and whose machinations deserved to be speedily exposed and punished.

It is sad to think how persistent rumours to man or woman's detriment act to their disparagement in the eyes even of those who know them best, and esteem them most. There never was malevolent proverb yet but what obtained implicit belief, and if there is one more often quoted than another, and regarded as a saying of the Saga, it is "that there is no smoke without fire." An absurd and wretched fallacy in these days, both practically and theoretically. We can cook a leg of mutton by a gas fire that shall give forth no particle of smoke, and preface it with a scandalous *entrée* containing no particle of foundation.

Miss Mangerston's persistent endeavours most decidedly bore fruit, for when the Barnsborow party broke up, Maude, indignantly though she repudiated it to herself, had doubts of Mr. Hainton's honest intentions implanted in her mind; while Miss Clothele, though she fiercely championed him if directly assailed, contemptuously as she might reject them, could not quite ignore her companion's innuendoes. She would not permit them, she would not believe them, but she could not forget them.

With the outsiders of the party, who knew nothing of the county and little of John Hainton, the problem had resolved itself into whether he had levanted with somebody's wife or somebody's money. Ralph Leslie, it is true, steadily set his face against all these theories. He had, of course, met Hainton on several occasions, and had judged him more favourably than to deem such rumours to his disadvantage might not be insufficiently founded. One thing only was certain, that whatever might be the reason of John Hainton's sudden disappearance, he certainly could not complain that it was insufficiently discussed.



## CHAPTER XX.

### DEATH OF SIR JOHN.

**D**URING the Autumn months Frederick Riversley had astonished the turf section of the London world not a little. Many of the old bookmakers who remembered the reckless plunger of former days had welcomed him back to Doncaster and Newmarket, with all the cordiality that a bankrupt banking establishment bestows on a new client who opens a large account with them. These veteran fielders thought it meant grist to the mill with a vengeance. They were mistaken; they fell into a common error amongst "the kite division" of humanity, namely, that experience always fails to teach. In racing, no doubt, it is the exception when it does so, but the wielders of the pencil were speedily alive to the fact that, foolish as Fred Riversley might have been in his youth, he was not given to throw away his money now. A good stake won over the Leger, and a veritable coup landed on the Cambridgeshire made the ring watch Captain Riversley's manipulation of the market with much respect. That he had confederates there was no doubt, but he apparently did the best part of his betting himself, and conducted his operations on a large scale. How does he get his information? clamoured those who had suffered heavily by betting with him. That was a question that, as yet, no one seemed capable of solving; but his victims

grimly observed, "He seems to know a good bit more than some of us, and spots the pea as if he moved the thimbles."

Fred Riversley received all congratulations with the utmost imperturbability; he replied languidly, that luck was merely an attribute of man, usually balancing itself in his lifetime; that having had it dead against him for something like ten years, it was time there was a run in his favour. The gay-hearted Guardsman of former times had been a young fellow whose wild animal spirits had more than once sufficed to carry off a dinner or supper party; such vivacity was catching and lit that mysterious spark upon which such gatherings depend. We all know it, we have all seen it scores of times. He, or she, may be neither wise nor witty, but that gay, joyous essence of mirth which laughs at dyspepsia, bad wine, or sodden *entrées* will successfully carry off a feast, while the perfectly served banquet of Lucullus is swathed in dulness. Captain Riversley of the present, with his sardonic cynicism, would never have been suspected of this attribute. The broken dandy of former days, though his purse might be light, could never refuse a loan to a comrade. He would have been a bad judge of human nature who had tried that experiment on the returned exile.

But with the first chills of winter came the news that old Sir John was dead. A bad cold ended in congestion of lungs and carried him off in a few days. He was proud, after the fashion of his race. He had never alluded to the death-stab dealt him by his son, nor had the slightest communication taken place between the two since Fred's visit to Bunnington on his first return. Sir John and those about him had no idea that he was in danger until quite the last, and as long as he was capable of giving orders the baronet sternly forbade that his son should be sent for. When Fred Riversley was, at last, telegraphed for, it was too late, and he arrived only to find that Sir John was dead. *Le roi est mort*, and he, Sir Frederick, reigns in his stead. Sir John could be hardly called a good landlord. Little of his income had he ever expended in improvements, requiring every shilling he could come by too urgently himself, to indulge in any such superfluous luxuries; wont to be somewhat greedy for his rents, after

the manner of those sore pressed for the sinews of war, still he had been ever a just man and had borne much at times from tenants in difficulties sooner then eject them from their holdings. It might be that he had a fellow feeling, that he felt he himself possessed *his holding* alike subject to the merciful consideration of his creditors, but I incline more to the belief that he considered those born vassals of the Riversleys, *i.e.*, tenants, should not be dispossessed save under dire provocation. Certain it is, that the farmers of the Bunnington lands were stirred to much grief at his death. He had been a kindly landlord, and though proud enough to his equals, had been ever courteous and free-spoken to those under his sway; would shake hands warmly with farmer Harris, for instance, asking heartily after his wife and daughters, while the slight inclination of the spine that he vouchsafed the entire Snoodleson family, the head of which had made a hundred thousand pounds over a soldier's boot contract during the Crimean war, was a refreshing sight to witness.

However, the funeral meats are baked; the black horses and plumes, the scarves, hatbands, and all the panoply of woe are collected by the paid mourners, who officiate at our burying in these times. What a grim burlesque are forty-nine funerals out of fifty! Round the open grave, the dead man's neighbours talked of the political situation, and the tenantry of the price of corn and live stock, while his son watched the proceedings with inflexible face. Seven years' knocking about amongst the scum of Europe had made Sir Frederick cool, cynical, hard, and unscrupulous; but though he concealed it well, he could not but feel bitterly the death of the fine old man, who, with all his numberless faults, had ever been an indulgent father to him. He blamed himself in no way for his conduct at their last interview. Sir John had run through what should have been his inheritance, and because he had unexpectedly come into another, he certainly considered that he was in no way bound to sacrifice that and the remainder of his life to the redeeming of Bunnington. No, he stood firm to his first business-like decision; at his father's death, Bunnington must go to the hammer, and the time was come.

There was little loss of appetite displayed over the "funeral meats" in the dining-room. The gentlemen of the neighbourhood who had attended speculated upon what the new baronet would do; recalled anecdotes of poor Sir John, wondered whether there would be a sale, and if that oily brown sherry now going down their throats so pleasantly, would, under such circumstances, be in the market. Was there much of it? and was there any quantity of that grand '48 claret still in the cellar? As for the farmers, they ate and drank stolidly; but their speculations took a somewhat different and more gravely personal form. It had oozed out there was considerable probability of the Bunnington property being sold, and men might well speculate grimly, and drink deeply as they did so, who saw no immediate outcome of the situation further than it was more than possible they would have to seek new homes. To abandon the home of your birth and childhood is a tearing up of the roots that kills at times, but is, to say the least of it, a bitter wrench, especially when involuntarily.

In the library, standing with his back to the fire, the new baronet looked with impassable face at his uncle, the Reverend Mortimer, and Mr. Sanderson, the family solicitor, as they refreshed the inner man. Mortimer Riversley was sincerely sorry for his brother, but what would you have? The appetite may be healthy after fifty, but the sensibilities are apt to get a little blunted; and regret them much, as we may, it is impossible to feel for the nearest relatives from whom our paths have been long severed, that abandonment of grief which poetry and fiction so constantly insist upon. Mortimer Riversley accorded as much love to the dead man, as most brothers, but the keen, frosty air had sharpened his appetite, and honestly as he might mourn poor John, he conceived that no reason for doing violence to the cravings of his stomach. The game pie was excellent, and the brown sherry a wine to risk gout about when you came across it. Sir Frederick, though he ate nothing but biscuits, gulped down more than one bumper of it, and appeared waiting for his companions to commence the conversation.

"Well, Fred," observed the rector, diligently searching



"I'm not particular, Fred, but that fellow ought to be doing penal servitude, as you know very well. What the deuce you keep such a scoundrel about you for, I can't conceive!"

"He's clever, and I *know* him," replied the baronet. "He stood to me in my own hard times, so I like to give him a share of my sunshine. If I can forgive his attempt to personate me, I don't think it matters to other people. I've seen men do worse to turn a hundred or two."

"But, of course, he'll rob you if you give him the chance?"

"Certainly; but I don't."

"If you can't trust the man, I do not see how he can be of much use to you," rejoined the Viscount.

"Never mind; he is in divers ways."

"It would be indiscreet to inquire further, but, you bear in mind, I don't covet his society."

"All right: it's an oversight his dining here to-day, though he's perhaps no worse than some you rub shoulders with in society."

"At all events, if that is so, society don't know it. In Mr. Solano's case we do, and don't mean to overlook it," rejoined Lithfield, a little sharply.

Solano, meanwhile, continued to pursue his mysterious avocations, which, whatever they might be, took him a good deal city wards. He spent much of his time in dingy little offices in the vicinity of the Exchange, with which he was apparently quite familiar—wicked little offices—some of them in which many bogus schemes and much villainy were concocted. Mr. Solano had figured, during his previous career in England, as the *beau ideal* of a nineteenth century brigand, a Robin Hood of the eighteen sixty's; and, like most heroes of that fraternity, he came at length to infinite grief. Not a visionary company of those days that he had not something to do with; not a turf robbery that he could not tell tales about. From floating a fraud in the financial world, to nobbling a Derby favourite, there was nothing that this modern Schinderhannes had not turned his attention to. He perished in the great crash of '66. Limited banks, that were rotten to the core, with which he was closely connected, together

with sound commercial businesses, in which his gains were invested, went down like card-houses. His turf creed of that year was infinite belief in the Danebury hoops, and much incredulity respecting Lord Lyon's fore-legs. Newmarket and Epsom were as more breaking banks to him. This racecourse Rob Roy, this Stock Exchange Schindelhannes, had more writs out against him, ere the season was ended, than ever had his Highland or Rhineland prototypes during their whole careers. Like them, he sought safety in flight. He did not see Doncaster, which, though perhaps disappointing to some of his acquaintance, was as well; for his disbelief in Lord Lyon had in nowise abated, and, as may be remembered, again the incredulous got mulcted for their scepticism. Such, in brief, is the history of Solano, who had been leading a vagrant predatory life on the Continent, for some three years or so, when Sir Frederick first met him, and under whose tuition he acquired a perilous knowledge of cards, and a shrewd insight into the science of living by his wits.

What could induce Frederick Riversley to keep this witness of his degradation; this preceptor, under whom he had graduated as a blackleg, still with him, when he was virtually rehabilitated, with all the means and inducements to live cleanly. Was it that he feared the disclosures that Solano might make? His conversation with that worthy disproves that idea. Sir Frederick had contracted two very ordinary weaknesses.

The first of these was this: Nobody was ever beaten yet who would not give a good deal to display infinite dexterity at that identical game, almost immediately. It is seeking consolation for outraged vanity. There never was broken turfite, or bankrupt Stock Exchange man, who did not dream of returning, at some time, to be pre-eminent in either of those pursuits. It is as much human nature, that the whilom pigeon should exult at developing into the rook, as for the young University man to come home and defy the village club, that once held him so cheap, to bowl him out. Frederick Riversley had this weakness to a considerable extent, and, to give the ring "a shaker," was an ambition he would have risked much for.

Secondly, the spendthrift constantly developes, later, a

keen lust for the acquisition of money, and this had now become a passion with the baronet. You must not think he was a miser—far from it—he was of an extremely speculative turn, which your miser never is. He was prepared to risk moneys, to some extent, providing there was promise of handsome and rapid returns, and the risk did not look excessive. It was these two things that had combined to make Sir Frederick retain Solano in his service. He believed in his cleverness, both at Newmarket and the Stock Exchange. It was by his advice that he cultivated the children of Mammon, instead of the children of Fashion, with such assiduity.

That Solano should be chary of appearing in the more frequented haunts of men, was but natural: let alone numberless unsettled turf transactions, there were several financial schemes, the collapsing of which had threatened to bring their promoters within the clutches of the law. Solano, like many others of those connected with such, wisely betook himself abroad before the law had quite made up its mind on the matter; but he felt a little uncertain whether even his ten years' expatriation had purchased condonation of his iniquities. He argued, that it could be hardly worth while to take proceedings against such a man of straw as himself—one from whom there could be no possibility of recovering lost capital, while the rancorous hate with which men view those who have successfully despoiled them of their gold, usually softens down with the lapse of years. The exasperated victim who would have ruthlessly prosecuted at the time of his loss, does not think it worth while to lay the robber by the heels ten years afterwards, especially when it is a question of vengeance only, and there is no power of compelling the accused to disgorge. So Solano, as he fancied, was allowed to go on his way unnoticed. He knew that it would not do for him to put himself prominently forward in any of those projects about which he was now busying himself; but his employer's was a good name on a board of directors. Solano had a pretty gift for the plausible manipulation of figures, an art, I take it, that is the main essential for a great financier.

While they were companions abroad, Solano had been

wont to amuse Fred Riversley by accounts of successful coups, brought off on the turf or in the City, all of which were characterised by very sharp practice, in some shape or other—proceedings, that though they might not be legally unfair, yet must have been pronounced so by any honourable man. Mr. Slick has somewhere remarked, that when a gentleman turns blackguard, he is exceptionally gifted, and usually eclipses his baser born fellows, and the seven or eight years that he had knocked about the Continent, in the company of demireps, vauriens, and adventurers, had left Fred Riversley unburthened with a shred of principle.

This worthy pair were lounging in front of the dining-room fire, in the snug little house in Chesterfield Street wherein the baronet had established himself, one evening in early spring. A nearly emptied claret-jug stood between them, while a tray, containing coffee and liqueurs, had evidently been just placed upon the table.

"Now we'll talk a little business," said Sir Frederick, as, having selected a cabana, he threw his case across to Solano. "First, the City news; those Gautemala shares keep going up?"

"Yes, and are going a bit higher yet. They are twelve per cent. better than when you bought in, and I'd trust 'em to spring seven or eight points still. That will be good enough to sell at. I keep my finger on the pulse of the market, anyway, and will give you prompt notice when to clear out."

"And that Rio Mining Scheme?" observed the baronet, interrogatively.

"Will suit you to have a hand in floating—it's as rotten as a pear, and will blow up in a year or two; but there's money to be got out of it to start with. You must have a dig at that."

"Five or ten?" said Sir Frederick, sententially, as he turned over the pages of his note-book.

"I'd play bold: go ten thousand, and clear out before six months are over. You will get about ten per cent. out of it that way; but if it is only five, don't hold on. That Rio Mine, mark me, is a first-class fraud."

"Excellent things when you're in 'em," returned the

baronet, with a dry laugh. "Now about Leatherlungs for 'the Guineas?'"

"Just what I've told you all along; a rattling good colt, but they can't train him."

"I laid another two thousand against him last week; but just remember, I'm very bad against this horse, and I want facts not suppositions."

"I am telling you what I know to be the case, and a thing I have in some degree verified with my own eyes. They can't train him, and know it, but they've too much money on to let him drop back much in the betting; they want to save as much of their stake as possible, and therefore they keep him cantering. But whenever they gallop him in earnest, his leg will go to a moral. They take tens to one; why, it's guineas to gooseberries against him. Never stop laying, that's my advice."

"Well, I've acted up to it pretty conscientiously so far," said Sir Frederick. "Now about another thing——." And here he paused, and looking into the fire, continued to pull dreamily at his cigar.

Solano watched him attentively. His missions so far had been relating to the City and Newmarket; what could this "other thing" be for which he was required? The further he wormed himself into his employer's confidence, "the more necessary and the more powerful I shall become," argued the crafty satellite; "it might become my turn to be master again. Let me ever get your head under my belt, Sir Frederick, as the saying goes, and, on my faith, you'll learn what your nose to the grindstone really means."

"You could find out whether a person I once knew is in London by taking a little trouble, I suppose?" said the baronet, at length.

"Can't say, till I know more," replied Solano. "It's a woman, of course?"

Sir Frederick nodded.

"What is the use of fencing with me? You must tell me all about her if I'm to be any good. She's not a woman in society, naturally, or else you could conduct your inquiries better than myself. 'A free lance,' I presume?"

"Yes, I suppose that is about what she would be put down as. Still in society, to some extent."

"Exactly; a star of that border land men drop when they marry, or at all events pretend to. 'Happy the nation that has no history,' said some one, in days gone by; happier still these ladies have mostly histories, and a taste for cigarettes. To find out whether a leader of 'the marches' is about town, still should be easy. May I ask the lady's name?"

"Marion Gardiner," replied the baronet, dryly.

Solano pricked up his ears, and, becoming immediately still more interested, said: "Living when last heard of, where?"

"Is a matter of no consequence to you; had she been there still, I should not have invoked your assistance. She left her old residence years ago."

"Chut! I might have known that," returned Solano, biting his lips. "I am growing stupid, Sir Frederick, or I should have asked you no such foolish question. Marion Gardiner! I'll not ask you for a description; but you've, perhaps, a photograph?"

"No," replied Sir Frederick; "I've nothing of that kind to help you. It is a matter of no great consequence; still, if you can make out Mrs. Gardiner, let me know."

"Mrs. Gardiner," observed Solano, at length, "will be probably not difficult to trace if still in London."

"No, I should imagine you would hear of her without much difficulty."

"Except under one possibility," said Solano.

"And that is?" inquired the baronet.

"That she has married again."

The two men exchanged a rapid glance, and then Sir Frederick observed, languidly, "What should make you think that?"

"I don't think it. I only suggest it may be so."

"Ah, yes, of course. Good-night. I feel sleepy. Don't bother, but if you can make out anything about Marion Gardiner, I should like to know it, that's all;" and so saying, Sir Frederick took his bedroom candlestick.

"Yes, and so should I," mused Solano, as he slowly finished his cigar. "I wonder what she has had to say to

his life, that he should be so curious about her. A man like Riversley don't care much, as a rule, to pick up the dropped stitches of a liaison that dates some seven years back or more. This is interesting; a hold upon you in this country, my worthy patron, would be a thing worth having. You are clever, and a credit to your preceptor. I never turned out a more accomplished pupil. Marion Gardiner! I feel very curious to know what his relations could have been with Marion Gardiner. Of course, I shall charge secret service money for this, though he is much too sharp to be bled to any extent over it. No; I taught Fred a good deal, and he's apparently lived with those who have taught him more. The truth is the one thing likely to deceive him now; he never sincerely believes any one; and as for myself, while feigning to trust, especially mistrusts me. Such men always come to grief. The successful adventurer is he who can pick out those he can trust, and who have it in their power to be useful to him. The trustworthy man you don't want, is no more worth cultivating than a crop that don't pay for the growing; but the game of life can be no more played single-handed than whist. You must trust your partner; Riversley don't, he plays only one hand; that's not whist." And so saying, the philosopher rose and betook himself to his couch.





## CHAPTER XXII.

### SIR FREDERICK CULTIVATES HIS RELATIONS.

**S**OLANO felt somewhat elated at his last instructions. If there was one thing he dearly longed for it was to obtain some hold upon his patron in this country. Some tangible hold, of course, for Sir Frederick had already shown how little he feared any disclosures that his quondam ally might make of his doings abroad. Solano was too much a citizen of the world not to recognize at once that if the brazen pipkin was not intimidated at being called black by the earthen pot, it was only too probable that the fate of the pot would be strictly in accordance with the fable. Sir Frederick was right—he'd no cause on the whole to fear what a penniless adventurer like Solano might think fit to allege against him. But the revolt of his old pupil annoyed Solano. We none of us much like it when those we have instructed beat us at what we thought our game. Robert Macaire's gorge would rise at serving under Jaques Strop, and Solano felt somewhat in that position; Jaques Strop, moreover, being outwardly rehabilitated while still domineering over him in the matter of crime. It was enough to wound the self-esteem of any *chevalier d'industrie* who counted himself of the first flight—to have to serve not only under one of his own recruits, but to find his talents occasionally jeered at besides. Solano chuckled at the commission to find Marion Gardiner.



"Given in the first place a mysterious woman," muttered that worthy to himself. "Why should he want to see her? Mysterious she is, of course, or he'd have no trouble about finding her. Why does he want to find her? It can hardly be affection; affection would hardly have survived all these years without writing; affection rather given to pens and paper as far as my observations go. Poor relation? no, I don't think my friend Frederick is likely to be hunting up poor relations." Here Solano paused, leaned his head upon his hand, and remained for two or three minutes pondering over all other probable solutions of the mystery.

"I can only see two," he muttered at length. "She may be wife, daughter, or something, to some pal he made abroad or at home before he was broke; possible, but not particularly likely. The other far more probable—to wit, that the woman has a claim upon him of some kind—strong, I should think, from my knowledge of the man; his besetting sin can hardly be called imprudent liberality. A claim he feels pretty sure will be urged, by his seeking her instead of leaving her to seek him. I am only justified in taking this somewhat limited view of the possibilities by my intimate knowledge of the man's character as he is now. Of course he was not so once; he was not so when I first knew him even, but he is so now, and the transmutation takes much less time than people generally are aware of. I must first find the woman, and then get at what the exact nature of her claim may be. I shall be a better judge than she of the value of it; but if it should prove to be good for anything, and I get the pulling of the strings, you will dance to a lively tune, Sir Frederick."

The quasi-secretary, while flitting round the Stock Exchange, and looking in upon any money-making hive within which he could count upon a tolerable reception—while interviewing racing touts, watching the movements of the turf market, and occasionally running down to Newmarket to see what he could pick up for himself, still never forgot nor neglected the quest of Marion Gardiner. He pushed his inquiries through many dark and dubious channels, as well as searching for her through higher sources, but the result was the same; at the beginning of

May, about two months after he received his instructions, he was still without any information concerning her, whether she was alive, or indeed ever had lived; as far as his own discoveries went he knew not, while Sir Frederick not only declined to give the slightest further information concerning her, but it was evident somewhat regretted having ever given instructions for her discovery.

The disposition to hunt something is, we know, innate in man, and the tracking a fellow-creature through the ins and outs of endless London I could fancy as exciting as the following up of any trail crossed on the prairies. Solano was persevering and patient as an Indian; his self-esteem was piqued at having failed to gain tidings of a lady whom he conjectured to have been probably known to a good many people in the London world, and he continued his search just as vigorously on his own account as he had begun it on his patron's. Another thing that stimulated Solano was this, no one ever more appreciated having "a pull" over a man than he did, but for "a pull" over Sir Frederick, like Faust, he'd have forfeited his soul. The baronet was not a pleasant man quite, to serve in a confidential capacity such as Solano's—bitter of speech when speculation of either kind went awry, sparing of praise when it proved successful. Although winning a large stake by the breaking down of Leatherlungs about ten days before the Two Thousand, he manifested neither gratitude nor liberality, while he was wont to use the check string with needless brutality. It is astonishing how much hatred and hostility a man may live up for himself by a brutal jeering manner to his inferiors, and it's odds there's one or two amongst them to whom the opportunity of exacting fierce retribution will come in the future.

As the season drew on Arthur Riversley awoke to the fact that pleasure has to be paid for, and that when you have but a limited income, a year of revelry is wont to be followed by a season of sadness. As long as he figured as probable heir of the Latimer Estates, tradesmen were only too glad to have his name on their books; but that bubble once exploded, they showed a covetous anxiety to have his money in their pockets. In short, once convinced he was

only a briefless barrister with vague and distant prospects, sundry of these gentry got a little uneasy about the settlement of their accounts, and subjected the unfortunate Arthur to a course of persistent "dunning." As Mr. Weller said of imprisonment for debt, this is a process which works unevenly, for whereas the neophyte is harassed and occasioned much mental perturbation, the hardened offender heeds such appeals, whether piteous, insolent, or threatening, no more than a duck does a thunderstorm. Beset and worried in this wise, Arthur more than once thought over the possibility of appealing to his cousin for assistance. He had made Sir Frederick's acquaintance of course; he had dined with him, and he really did think that considering all the circumstances the baronet really ought to do something for him, an opinion in which he was strengthened by more than one of his intimates, who deemed Sir Frederick was in some sort bound to do a little bit of graceful liberality, when he thought of the peculiar wording of his uncle's will.

And yet Arthur felt intuitively that his cousin was not a man to do a generous action, nor likely to listen with sympathetic ear to the story of his difficulties. If he has shown himself miserably weak and conceited so far in this history, it must be borne in mind that many a young man, under less temptation than Arthur Riversley, has come out of the trials of his opening career no better, and that a sharp lesson at starting has brought ballast and better feeling to many. They have learned that wholesome truth, to wit, his best and dearest friends cannot help the man who will not help himself; and mastered the truth of About's famous maxim, "that money, if not inherited or won in a lottery, is only acquired by work." To jibb at the collar at first is common enough; it has been at starting, even with those who now feel bored to death if long out of harness. Arthur was quite young enough yet to buckle to work, but he did not, as yet, grasp the necessity for doing so. He still clung to the idea that his cousin ought to help him; as to what extent, he was vague in the extreme; but he shrank from putting this view of his affairs before Sir Frederick. The young man could not have borrowed a few pounds without stammering over the

request, differing in this respect considerably from some of his seniors, who would have proposed a small loan to the acquaintance of an hour without embarrassment, if they thought such an application likely to be successful. Arthur Riversley, meanwhile, mused moodily over his liabilities with a hazy idea that it was the baronet's bounden duty to, at all events, set him straight with the world once more.

As the season wore on, Sir Frederick heard of the arrival of his uncle in town. He was not much given at this time to study the conventionalities, but still he felt it incumbent on him to leave a card on the Rev. Mortimer. It is doubtful whether much more would have come of it had not his uncle met him before he'd got a dozen paces from the door, and insisted upon his turning back and having a cup of tea with his aunt and cousins. Sir Frederick assented, with somewhat indifferent grace, but he was most agreeably surprised. He had pictured to himself twenty minutes of platitudes; he spent an extremely pleasant hour, and, as he made his bow, vowed that his cousin Maude, and her friend, Miss Clothele, were the two nicest young women he had come across for years. Ladies' society was a little apt to bore the baronet at this time, and a couple of clever and unconventional girls to talk to, a thing of which he lacked experience. From this out Sir Frederick cultivated his relations with considerable assiduity. He invited the family to a quiet dinner, and both the Rev. Mortimer and Arthur felt sanguine about his volunteering to do something for the latter. As for Mrs. Riversley, she had utterly forgotten John Hainton, and could only think how well dear Maude and her newly-found cousin were suited to each other. The rector's wife was somewhat given to speculation on most social subjects, but the marrying of her eldest daughter was a topic on which she never tired of meditating. Mr. Hainton had found much favour in her eyes, but when a man goes suddenly abroad at the very time he is expected to propose, it argues, thought Mrs. Riversley, infirmity of purpose, or change of mind. Why John Hainton had gone abroad nobody seemed to have the least idea; about where he had gone even, his relations seemed

puzzled. Mrs. Riversley had made due inquiry before leaving Clumbershire, and all even his mother could tell was, "on business she believed, and that she thought he had gone to America." So that when Sir Frederick took to frequenting their house, the good lady viewed his visits with much approbation. She rightly judged that the baronet did not drop in so constantly to tea or luncheon, to see either herself or the rector, and with divers noddings and upraising of eyebrows, confided to her cronies that "it would do very well."

As for Maude, she never thought about her cousin's visits in that way at all. It seemed natural enough to her that Sir Frederick should seek the society of the only near relatives he had, and that while they were in London they should see a good deal of him was what might be expected. She cared very little about him, either one way or the other; if she didn't exactly like him, she didn't particularly dislike him. A near kinsman, of whom it behoved her to make the best, was about the summing up of her feelings towards him. As regards John Hainton, her breast was filled with a bitter sense of resentment. She felt that she had merited better treatment than she had received; that John Hainton had gone too far to leave her abruptly without a word of explanation, or a line of adieu, and yet the sole clue to his disappearance was contained in those half-dozen lines addressed to Lady Prosnobore. Could Miss Mangerston be right, mused Maude, as she recalled that conversation at Barnsborow, and was John Hainton but a mere male flirt after all? Nonsense, the man's whole nature was against it. He, a man, who rode, shot, fished, or valed with a will, and as if his heart and soul were in the amusement of the hour, was little likely to play the part of a *petit maître*. She had seen somewhat of the world of late, and Maude felt intuitively that it was not of such stuff these triflers were made. And, yet, if it were not so, how could he simulate such devotion, and then vanish without even saying good-bye. She knew not what to think, but the predominant feeling in her bosom was, that she had been badly used, and, bitterest of all, that her dearest friends both knew it and pitied her.

How she detested Caroline Mangerston at this time.

She never had liked her, and now Miss Mangerston thought fit to affect a soft, sad, sympathetic manner towards her that went near to madden Maude. Even Ethel Clothele she regarded with suspicion. She knew that Ethel's original opinion had been, that she'd but to lift her finger to become Mrs. Hainton. Ethel said nothing about this now, and when Maude purposely introduced John Hainton's abrupt and mysterious disappearance into their conversation, always evaded the subject. The fact was, Ethel had gradually given way to Caroline Mangerston's opinion of that gentleman, and had come to regard him as habitually given—

“To make love to the lips that are near.”

Miss Clothele felt more bitter than her friend about the whole affair, and inwardly vowed that John Hainton should obtain scant grace at her hands, if ever he should be at her mercy. An awkward vow this to have recorded against one, for dare the wisest of us say that any pretty woman of his acquaintance may not in time to come put her yoke about his neck. The bigger the hero the more utter his subjugation. From Hercules and Omphale to Nelson and Lady Hamilton, the story never varies. How then can the small fry hope to escape the toils should they be laid for them? That the mouse slips through the meshes that entrap the lion is no doubt true, but the man laid siege to by a pretty woman is, to say the least of it, in considerable danger, and it is likely to go hard with him if the leaguer be not quickly raised.

Especially, did Arthur Riversley welcome the, what may be termed, domestication of Sir Frederick in the family circle. He regarded it from a peculiar view of his own as personifying capital at his back, and yet Arthur would have been fain to confess that his cousin still seemed a most impracticable person to appeal to for assistance.





## CHAPTER XXIII.

### THE PRICE OF ASSISTANCE.

**T**HE spring had slipped away, and, as the London season waxed gayer and gayer, Arthur Riversley found his money difficulties increasing in like proportion. Not only did creditors get more importunate, but the ready money indispensable to a young man who moves in a somewhat lively section of society became every day harder to lay hands upon. The money-lenders to whom he had recourse last year, and who were not adverse to risking moderate advances at enormous interest, thought by no means so well of their speculation now Sir Frederick had reappeared. Far from being accommodating with regard to further loans, they growled ominously at his applications to renew the bills they held. Arthur was meditating ruefully over these prospects one morning in his rooms in the Temple, but, for the life of him, he could hit upon only two solutions, and he could not quite make up his mind as to which course was the most unpalatable. Should he appeal to his cousin or his father? His heart misgave him when he thought of applying to Sir Frederick. He had listened more than once at batchelor dinners to the baronet's cynical talk, and felt rather nervous when he thought of the sarcastic terms in which a refusal might be couched. He might appeal to his father, but the Rev. Mortimer had already hinted that if he attended to his profession more, and to "the busi-

ness of pleasure" somewhat less, he should be better pleased with him; moreover his father would undoubtedly make his renunciation of the sweets of the season a condition of his assistance, and Arthur could by no means bring himself to that. Capua had not palled upon him as yet—it rarely does till the good is sucked out of us.

As he sat thus moodily ruminating, the click of the letter-box fell on his ear. "Another brute, whose future depends upon my settling his account within ten days. I never realised how our lives were entwined till this year. My stopping payment would apparently bring desolation into various happy homes. I may as well look at it. Might be an invitation, by good luck. By Jove, it is!—Frederick's hand—no dun, any way. 'Will I dine with him in Chesterfield Street at eight on Thursday next?' Let me see! No, I've no other engagement; that will do very well. I'll write an answer to say yes at once."

He turned to the writing-table, artistically strewn with law-books, and scribbled his acceptance.

"It looks like fate," he muttered. "If I do get a *tête-à-tête* with him, I'll sound him on the subject. I funk asking him, he has such a bitter tongue on men's weaknesses nowadays; and yet, according to all accounts, his own early career was graced with more follies than most men's. Still, I think I would rather ask him than my father."

It was with a slight twitter of the nerves that Arthur knocked in Chesterfield Street on Thursday. He felt that, when he came out again, he might have preferred his petition, and preferred it in vain, and he had just begun to realise that in a somewhat vague fashion he had counted more upon this assistance than he fancied, until he found himself on the verge of asking for it. He was shown up into the pretty little drawing-room, and the *convives*, six in number, were speedily gathered together. Sir Frederick's rule about dinner-giving to men was simple—"The time mentioned is meant, and I grant ten minutes' law and no more, if I sit down alone. I keep a good cook, and don't see the fun of sitting down to cold soup and *entrées* because somebody else has been too lazy to dress in time. As regards the women, it's different. Of course you must



dine when they choose to come; and as they rarely know anything about cookery, sodden dishes don't matter to them. A glass of champagne and a sweetbread while you are dressing, if you feel hungry, is to be recommended." The dinner was excellent, and the talk, led by the host and Solano, amusing. The pair seemed to be well up in all that was going on in the great London world, in the turf world, and in the city, and the guests were thoroughly pleased with their entertainment. One was the eldest son of a wealthy Stock Exchange man, another the junior partner in a very speculative firm, while the third, and youngest, was the heir of a defunct cotton-spinner, and had, some three years before, inherited a large fortune, with a passionate desire to get into fashionable society. Arthur had of course met Solano before, but he had no idea that his cousin's managing man could be so agreeable a companion. A thorough citizen of the world, with suave manners, and a considerable fund of anecdote, Solano could be a very pleasant *causeur* when he listed. Was it not part of the stock-in-trade of such as he had been for years? Without pleasant, easy manners, the *chevalier d'industrie* would scarce pick up a livelihood. Whist was the order of the evening upon returning to the drawing-room, but whist upon a moderate scale.

"Play what stakes you like, gentlemen; but as there are three of us here who don't play high, let us arrange that two of us three, Solano, my cousin, and myself, shall play against each other. We can easily cut out—the two highest of the small players play with the two highest of the gamblers, according to the cutting."

But the others protested that they did not care about playing high, so a very modest rubber was at last inaugurated. Still, in spite of this sort of protest against gambling, Arthur noticed that his cousin made three or four heavy bets with the cotton-spinner chrysalis developing into fashion's butterfly and the suckling stockbroker, but these were on turf matters, to which the chrysalis was ever and anon returning with more astounding manifestation of ignorance of the subject. The baronet's big regalias seemed to have the effect of weakening his whist, and strengthening his opinions; and, after some severe re-

voking on his part, consequent on a total misapprehension of what were trumps, the whist-table broke up, and the players sought their coats and hats. Sir Frederick laughingly declined to lay Drygoods the odds against the favourite for the Ascot Cup, although he had good reason to believe that noble animal would not probably start—would certainly never get round the course if he did—as he rejoiced in a most portentous leg. A little more noisy chaff as the triumvirate departed, and the host was left with Solano and his cousin.

“Very good-natured of you to let young Drygoods off that hundred,” said Solano, with a quiet laugh. “Stampede will never stand winding up. It’s all the odds he wanted against her ever seeing Ascot at all.”

“He was rather too screwed to bet with,” rejoined the baronet, significantly. “I am going to have a quiet cigar with Arthur, and then turn in.”

“All right—then I’ll say good-night, as I have some work to do before I go to bed. Good-night, Mr. Riversley;” and so saying, Solano departed.

The two cousins smoked silently for some minutes. Arthur was trying to screw his courage to the point. He felt that fortune had favoured him, and that he had an opportunity he could scarcely have hoped for. As for Sir Frederick, he was musing over the pity he had been unable to lay that bet, but the baronet, though a keen practitioner, was careful to keep within due bounds. He always deprecated high play in his own house, and, indeed, was little given to it elsewhere. He knew that he had been mixed up in play transactions abroad that would be speedily raked up and brought to England if he should be fortunate at the card-table nowadays. He prudently eschewed it except for such moderate stakes as could not produce gossip. There were plenty of other ways, he argued, of getting the better of his fellows which would attract no attention. Amateur bookmaker and Stock Exchange speculation offered these advantages, providing always his fellows did not get the better of him. With the apprenticeship he had served, and Solano’s assistance, he did not think that probable, despite the many wool-gatherers who annually lose their own fleeces. And yet,

little more than ten years ago, and Frederick Riversley had been as frank, high-spirited, honourable a gentleman as there was in Her Majesty's Service. Men get broke, recover, and turn out honest and respectable members of Society once more, but then they don't bemoan their iniquities amongst the continental watering-places.

"I am glad you asked me to stop, Fred," said Arthur, rather nervously at last. "I particularly want to have a talk to you."

The baronet turned round and eyed his cousin keenly. He saw trouble and embarrassment in his face, and already half guessed the confession that was coming, but it was not in his nature now to make that avowal easier. It had been otherwise once, and he might have remembered that when he told his father a similar story years ago, if it had been fruitless of result, it had, at all events, been kindly and sympathetically listened to. Useless confession it was bound to be, as poor Sir John lacked the means to assist him, though no word of upbraiding escaped his lips to the son who had trod his footsteps only too faithfully.

"The fact is I've got horribly into debt, and am disgustingly hard up," continued Arthur, very quickly. "You see, the governor only gives me a moderate allowance, and I can't expect to make anything at my profession as yet."

"Well, you're not in it yet, you know."

"Just so. Then, of course, as a Riversley——"

"And heir to the Latimer estates," added the baronet, dryly.

"Nonsense; I don't mean that. But that, as a Riversley, I have been asked a good deal into society."

"I do mean that; but go on."

"I contend, as a Riversley, Fred—Now, what's a man to do? Of course, it is my bounden duty to know all the right people I can. A man starting in life would be a fool not to do that," and here Arthur paused for a reply.

"Very much so, except that, at your time of life, there is one considerable drawback to it."

"Drawback! What can you mean? Surely it must be good to know all people moving in the best society."

The baronet gazed at him for a moment with an amused expression, then, flipping the ash off his cigar, exclaimed—

“Still in the blind state of puppydom! Now, don’t be riled, but listen to me. I, recollect, have been some fifteen years collecting the little budget of wisdom I am going to transmit to you in considerably less than as many minutes. Society, at its best, will entertain you if you amuse it, and will drop you, as a rule, upon the first suspicion of your wanting a twenty pound note. Society saps your energy, saps your finances. Half-a-dozen good attorneys are fifty times more valuable acquaintances to you than half the peerage would be at present. You have a weakness for the great world? Good. Score off your own bat, and it is the great world comes to you, and then—be somewhat exclusive, and know those only who may be of use to you, who wield real power. Queens of beauty, if you will, if they sway men who hold power or command the whim, toy, or ribbon that you have set your heart on. Never overlook, yet never overrate the power of women in the game of life; and, remember, it’s not society’s belles by any means who pull strings of this description. These women past the thirties, only nice-looking, but with low voice, fascinating manner, and keen intellect are the women to know. Don’t bother your head about the beauties. Like the President of the United States their empire is of four years’ tenure, and with much more limited patronage. The Ninons and Cleopatras are stars of a cycle like your great men. My lecture’s finished. Go on, young ’un.”

“Yes, and I dare say you’re right in all you say,” replied Arthur. “But what am I to do in the meantime?”

“Duns pressing?”

“Disagreeably so.”

“Assets nothing, and been to the Jews, of course?”

Arthur nodded assent.

“Hum! First mucker. I should say, appeal to your father, and don’t half do it. Let him know the lot.”

“But I don’t quite like to do that.”

“Of course not. We none of us do, and, what’s more, they like it less as a rule. Mine was an exception.”

"Did he put you straight without a row the first time?" inquired Arthur, cagerly.

"No, he couldn't. He'd spent it all himself; but he was as sorry, poor old man, about the thing as I was."

"And then?" asked Arthur, whose curiosity about his cousin's former crash for a moment suspended the anxiety he felt about his own affairs.

"And then," rejoined Sir Frederick, in mocking tones. "Well, you look like having a personal experience of the 'then.' The Jews advanced you money on the chance of my death, just as society advanced you invitations. Don't flatter yourself it was because you were a Riversley; it was because you were *the* Riversley likely to inherit the Latimer property, and, in days to come, the baronetcy."

"And, if it was so, and that I also fell into the same mistake, don't you think that it is incumbent on you to help me in the trouble that misconception has entailed upon me?" cried Arthur, passionately.

"Not exactly, *mon cher*," rejoined Sir Frederick, quietly.

"You can't expect me to reimburse all the speculators on my death. It would hardly be good taste on my part to let them understand I know they wish me dead and buried."

Arthur felt the justice of his cousin's sarcastic rebuke. He was silent for a minute or two, and then said—

"You are not bound legally, of course, but you can easily conceive——"

"That you lulled yourself into the belief that I was dead, and basked in the sunshine of my anticipated inheritance," laughed Sir Frederick. "Quite so. I should have done it myself at your age, and raised, I'll go bail, double the amount you managed to do on my prospects."

"Then you decline to help me?" said Arthur, sullenly.

"I didn't say so. You have not even mentioned what help you require as yet."

"Two thousand, nearly."

"Not a bad beginning for the first year. Is that the whole of it?"

"Yes, it includes my Oxford ticks, start in town, &c., and all my bills."

"Never mind the start in town, &c. I wouldn't dwell

upon that if I were you. Fathers generally write a cheque for that sort of thing, just as sons constantly go tick for the necessary furniture, and gamble away the money given them for its purchase. Two thousand is a stiff sum, Master Arthur."

"But you will find it me, will you not? You surely owe me——"

"Nothing as yet," interrupted the baronet sententiously.

"Of course I may do, and then, perhaps, I may feel bound to redeem my debt by assisting you."

"But you utterly decline to do anything for me now," rejoined Arthur, bitterly. "You might have saved my boring you with this confession if you'd only said so at first."

"As I observed before, I didn't say so," rejoined the baronet, as he slowly ejected a cloud of tobacco smoke.

"I can't understand you," exclaimed Arthur, impetuously; "you won't and you will. What do you mean?"

"The first sensible question you have asked," said the baronet, leaning forward in his chair towards his interlocutor. "My meaning is this, as a cousin I won't give you a shilling, but as a brother-in-law, I'll find you two thousand pounds."

"As a brother-in-law—a brother-in-law!" gasped Arthur, utterly dumbfounded. "You don't mean to say you want to marry Maude?"

"Just so; do you see any particular objection to the arrangement?" replied Sir Frederick, sharply.

"No, no, certainly not; I only mean I never thought you cared about Maude in that way."

"Very likely; now listen to me. Women are very quick to learn that a man is smitten with them. It is just possible that your sister might have guessed that it was so, though you didn't. Do you think it is so?"

"On my word I don't know," replied Arthur.

"Good! you see I can offer your sister an excellent position. In a worldly point of view, I'm a good match for her. An only brother can often persuade a girl a good bit in a matter of this sort, you understand. Remember, the day I'm engaged to your sister, you may consider your debts as off your shoulders."

“And what do you wish me to do?”

“Nothing just yet. When the time comes you will simply do what I tell you. You needn't look dazed like that, it won't be above a week or two. In the meantime, if fifty is a convenience, there you are.”

“Thank you awfully,” said Arthur, as he crumpled up the crisp Bank of England note, and thrust it into his waistcoat.

This solution of his difficulties seemed delightful, and as Sir Frederick had said, from a worldly point of view, he was a good match; there was no reason why he should not support his cousin in an affair which had conduced so much to his, Arthur's interest. True, he had a strong notion that his sister, if not actually engaged, was in a fair way to be to John Hainton, but Hainton had gone abroad, and there was no use in troubling Sir Frederick about that.

“Well, Arthur, you understand,” said the baronet, “I am going to make strong running on my own account just now, and I count upon your interest in my behalf as soon as I call upon you to exert it.”

“Depend upon me,” said Arthur, warmly.

“Yes, I think I can,” returned his cousin, dryly.

They shook hands, and it was with a light heart Arthur Riversley walked home to the Temple. Of course Maude would accept Fred. Why he had as much money as Hainton, and then he could make her Lady Riversley—an addition that would of course turn the scale with any woman.





## CHAPTER XXIV.

### MISS CLOTHELE'S DANCE.

**M**R. HANTON, Enderly Park, Boodle's Club, St. James' Street," exclaimed Miss Clothele, pausing in her tramp up and down her own drawing-room to take the card a servant proffered her. "He didn't ask to come in, Robert, I suppose?"

"No, Miss."

"I rather wish he had, Caroline, don't you? I should like to hear how he accounts for his mysterious disappearance."

"I don't feel your curiosity about it; I have told you my estimate of Mr. Hainton some time since. You always vowed he was head over heels in love with your friend Miss Riversley. As I told you, Ethel, the man is an incorrigible flirt."

"But what has that got to do with his abrupt disappearance?"

"Everything. He felt doubtless that he had gone so far with Miss Riversley, that to meet her for a week in a country house would end almost inevitably in the loss of his freedom. He saw people began to make way for him where she was concerned; in short, that they looked upon it as 'a case.' He took to his heels; those sort of men always do under such circumstances. They go abroad till we get over it."

"I can hardly think that. I don't believe, Caroline,



John Hainton is a despicable wretch of that kind; I always thought him a straightforward honest gentleman, especially in his love for Maude."

Miss Mangerston, who was seated at the writing-table, nibbled the top of her pen for a few seconds, and then said softly: "I dare say you are right, Ethel, but you must excuse my not agreeing with you. When a man goes as far as Mr. Hainton has gone, he behaves badly in my opinion if he does not ask the girl to marry him."

"If I really thought that was the meaning of his going abroad, I declare I would never speak to him again," said Ethel; and there was something in the slightly hesitating tones that might have made a shrewd observer suspect she was already leaning towards her companion's opinion.

"Shall I send him a card for to-night?" inquired Miss Mangerston. "Of course, ignorance of his being in London is excuse enough for the shortness of the invitation. No doubt he has only just arrived, or we must have heard of him."

"Yes, do," replied Ethel; "he will meet Maude at all events, if he has not already done so, and I shall be able to form some judgment of which of us is right in her opinion. We shall perhaps hear what account he gives of his absence."

"Oh, I'll tell you that—'pressing business called him abroad;' he said that in his note, you know. You're not likely to get anything more definite from him."

"You dislike Mr. Hainton," said Ethel, suddenly. "Why?"

"Because I say, under the circumstances, that he will be vague in the extreme concerning his foreign trip? No; I only speak out of my experience of humanity generally, who are invariably reticent concerning what I may term their clandestine flittings."

"Did you two ever quarrel?"

"My dear Ethel! Why, he is barely conscious of my existence."

Miss Clothel said no more, but she felt no doubt about Miss Mangerston's dislike for John Hainton; nevertheless, she was fast coming round to Miss Mangerston's way of thinking. At all events, as she had said, his meeting with

Maude would surely tell the lookers-on the precise state of the case, and if, as she had conjectured, he had only just arrived in London, it was very possible he did not know where the Reverend Mortimer had set up his tent this season, or even for certain whether he and his were in Town.

"Send him a card, Carrie," she observed at length, "and tell him he will meet his enchantress."

"Much better not tell him that," replied Miss Mangerston. "If you are right in your ideas, he will come to any invitation of yours, knowing that he is certain to meet Miss Riversley, if she is in London. On the contrary, if I am right, he will probably not come, and plead he received his invitation too late."

"Do as you like ; but you'll see Mr. Hainton will be early in the field."

"It may be. I think otherwise ; we shall see."

This party for which John Hainton was sent an invitation at such short notice, was a dance given by Miss Clothele in Princes Gate. It had been a good bit discussed in society, as it was known that it was to be restricted to such limited dimensions that dancing should be really possible and enjoyable. Difficulty about getting places or invitations for any entertainment, it is well known, stimulates the thirst for obtaining them, and Miss Clothele had undergone much embarrassment in parrying hints and petitions on this head ; people generally being profoundly impressed with the idea that just two or three more could not make any difference, and perfectly oblivious to the fact that in such cases twos and threes speedily amounted to hundreds. John Hainton's mysterious absence had been an opportunity that Miss Mangerston had not failed to improve to the best of her ability. As we know, she cherished no good-will for either Maude or Hainton, and would gladly gratify her malice by promoting a rupture between them ; but what she did dearly long for was to occasion a breach between Miss Riversley and Ethel. She knew that she had sown doubts of Hainton's loyalty in the minds of both girls. They indignantly refused to listen to her theory that John Hainton was a mere philanderer—that is, to speak more correctly, Ethel did. Poor Maude was, of course, in great

measure, tongue-tied. She could not answer. She was compelled to affect indifference or betray herself one of the lady-killer's victims—a humiliation that a proud girl would sooner perish than admit. But Miss Mangerston saw that her accusations went home, and that Maude was gradually beginning to absorb the poison so continuously trickled into her ears. Ethel, it was true, protested vehemently, as she had just done, but Caroline Mangerston saw that her loyalty was sapped, and though her tongue might still stand up for the deserter, her mind was ripe to receive testimony to his disadvantage.

So far her cards had played themselves, but the reappearance of Hainton upon the scene necessitated some manipulation on her part. What should she do about this invitation, for instance—send it or not send it? She thought the former. “To keep it back will only delay the meeting of the lovers a few days. They shall meet to-night, and a final rupture must be accomplished between them. If I could but make Ethel the cause! Difficult, but possible. We shall see. In the meantime, I’d best write Hainton’s card; but to convince Ethel that he is in no very great earnest in his wooing, I must name a late hour instead of the very unfashionable ten. If I put twelve, he will look upon it as supper and a dance after the theatres, instead of the ‘small and early’ affair it really is, and drop in accordingly—no indelicate hurry to see the presumed lady of his love about that!” muttered Miss Mangerston, with a wicked smile. “But how to bring about the other part of my little comedy? Ah! I am afraid I must trust to my star and the chapter of accidents. But, Miss Riversley, if I could show you your lover bending to Ethel’s yoke, I think I should see my pillow exulting.”

Miss Clothele had given her guests clearly to understand that ten meant ten, and that it was to be an early party; consequently, eleven saw most of them assembled, although, thanks to Miss Mangerston’s manœuvre, John Hainton was not amongst them. How much mischief she should be able to manufacture out of the evening, that young lady did not as yet know; but she was possessed with the very spirit of malice. She had taken care that Maude should be informed that her lover was expected, as soon as she arrived, and lost

no opportunity of calling Ethel's attention to Mr. Hainton's non-appearance.

"You will find I am right in my views," she whispered to Miss Clothele. "Half-past eleven, and no sign of this love-lorn swain as yet."

She had no fixed design at present in all this, but she conceived it might assist her machinations to irritate Ethel as much as possible against the absentee; while she had further maddened Maude by sympathetic whispers to the effect that "gentlemen did dawdle so at their clubs, but that Mr. Hainton, though it was getting late, would be there, she felt sure." Having made all the arrangements in her power to secure John Hainton a chilling reception, Miss Mangerston awaited that gentleman's arrival with much satisfaction and no little curiosity.

The galope preceding supper had just struck up when Hainton made his appearance, not unreasonably late in doing so, when we remember the hour named upon his card of invitation; but on the presumption that he had been bidden at ten, an ordinary keen-sighted hostess would have pronounced that he had merely dropped in for supper, and meant to bear no share in the immediate diversion of the evening. Ladies who give real dances are sometimes much exercised at the cool indifference manifested by the young men of this generation to that amusement.

"Wretches," quoth a vivacious hostess, to the writer, "they prefer an ortolan in aspic to the best valse Strauss ever wrote, and plovers' eggs to 'The Night-belle Galope' infinitely. When I was a girl, thank goodness, they had a good deal more 'go' and a good deal less appetite."

John Hainton was rather taken aback at discovering the assemblage in the flood-tide of a spirited dance; he had expected to find them still gossiping round the supper-table, and could not understand how the existing state of things had come about. He was wandering rather aimlessly about the doorway, when he was espied by Miss Mangerston, and that lady at once made up her mind to take possession of him. With her sweetest smile she requested her partner to take her across the room, and then added, "You must excuse me for a moment. In my character of assistant-hostess, I see one or two late arrivals I must

chide civilly in Ethel's behalf." Another second, and she was shaking hands cordially with her victim, who was somewhat surprised at the warmth of her greeting.

"I'm so very glad to see you back, Mr. Hainton. Your friends have been lost in astonishment at your sudden disappearance. Only that your own people voted that you were all safe, I think we should have put you down kidnapped, and there would have been as much fuss about your disappearance as is usual about a suspected murder. We must look for Ethel, who will be delighted to see you ; and, dear me, I forgot your former attraction, Maude Riversley, is here somewhere, and no doubt will welcome you warmly. Was it not odd, her lost cousin turning up after all ? "

"I saw something about it in the papers," muttered Hainton, in utter despair of stemming the flood of eloquence let loose upon him.

"Oh, yes ! and now his father's dead, he's Sir Frederick, you know. Sad disappointment for poor Arthur, as you may conceive ; and yet rumour has it the Latimer estates won't go altogether out of *his* family."

"Of course not ; his cousin inherits them."

"Oh, yes ! and you know how people talk ; but they do say he means sharing them with Maude. At all events, they are always together."

"I don't understand you."

"No, well ! but stop. Ah, the riddle will explain itself. Here comes Maude Riversley, and that slight dark man upon whose arm she is leaning, is her cousin, Sir Frederick, and the world has it that she will be Lady Riversley before long. Unless, ha, ha !—they never thought of that—you interfere to prevent it."

"And there were people who deemed that Miss Mangerston had nothing to say for herself."

The result of this meeting can easily be conceived. Hainton addressed Maude in somewhat constrained fashion ; while the girl, her pride wounded by his unaccountable neglect, and aware that she was under the keen cynical eye of Caroline Mangerston, returned it in the coldest and most conventional manner. As for Sir Frederick, he regarded Hainton with supercilious indiffer-

ence, as if his being there at all was a questionable liberty. Although Arthur had refrained from enlightening him concerning his rival, yet the baronet was too wily a man not to put a few questions as to whether his cousin had been much in society, &c., and speedily elicited what he wanted to learn, that Hainton had been a devoted admirer all last season, but had suddenly gone off, Heaven only knew where. Whether to look after big game in India, or the sources of the Nile and the development of Central Africa, no one could say.

If the two leading actors in this little drama walked away sore with each other, and bitter at heart, their partners in the play felt equally jubilant at the result of the meeting. It was clear to both of them that Maude Riversley and John Hainton were, to put it mildly, no longer in *rapport*.

“‘The little rift’ is very apparent,” said Miss Mangerston to herself, as they passed on. “It shall be my business to permanently enlarge it. Please take me downstairs, and feed me, Mr. Hainton; I have danced myself into a state of positive famine.”

Miss Clothele became aware for the first time that John Hainton had availed himself of her invitation, as the pair entered the supper-room. Had he seen Maude, she wondered. Apparently, for she saw that he passed close to Miss Riversley without stopping to speak, and surely he would not have done so unless that had been the case. Judging from the hour at which he had thought proper to make his appearance, there had been no feverish anxiety about meeting the lady to whom but a few weeks back he had displayed such open devotion. Miss Clothele's brow contracted slightly as she saw that John Hainton, though seated in Maude's immediate vicinity, made no attempt to address her. Was Caroline Mangerston right? and had Mr. Hainton the audacity to think that a girl like Maude was to be thrown on one side like a pair of old gloves, when he should weary of saying soft things to her? Ethel ground her little white teeth as she thought of how society smiles over a lovelorn damsel, and muttered in her wrath, “Oh, that I were a man, for his sake; but as I am not, I'll even be a very woman, for her's.”

The fair object of Ethel's solicitude in the meanwhile showed no sign of annoyance. She chatted gaily with Sir Frederick, who was taking care of her, and was apparently utterly oblivious of Mr. Hainton's presence; but Miss Clothele knew her friend too well not to know that she would be bitterly stung by such desertion. Protest as she might, Ethel knew that Maude's feelings were much more involved than she could ever be brought to confess, and in the fulness of her indignation she determined upon making John Hainton rue his supposed faithlessness if it were within her power. How was she to dream of the delicate innuendoes by which the man's jealousy had been aroused and the girl's modesty alarmed? how guess, that two people sincerely attached to each other, were making themselves miserable at the malicious instigation of a woman they both disliked? Lovers from time immemorial have always shown much dexterity in the mismanagement of their affairs, but that Ethel should unwittingly set herself to abet Caroline Mangerston in promoting an estrangement between this unfortunate pair, was a piece of bad fortune that could hardly be counted on.

When Miss Clothele met Hainton in the ball-room, after supper, the Miss Mephistophiles of the little drama was fairly taken aback. If there was one thing Caroline Mangerston felt she could count upon, it was that the Squire of Enderly would meet with a chilling reception. Quite the contrary: Ethel received him with the greatest *empressement*, she ruthlessly threw over a favourite partner to give him a valse, and there could be no doubt about it, went off, at score, into an incipient flirtation with John Hainton. He was no fool; but where is the man who, played false by his lady-love, would throw away such a chance of retaliation. Who, when a strikingly handsome girl, an acknowledged beauty of the London world, threw herself at his head, and that, too, in the presence of the woman who had slighted him, would have the resolution not to respond to so fair a challenge. No man, whose pulses beat strong in his veins, but must have accepted the glove thus thrown down to him. Miss Mangerston, surprised as she had been at first, speedily read the riddle aright. That mischievous young woman laughed in her

sleeve, as she saw how everything combined to play her game for her. Ethel, seeking to avenge her friend by bringing Hainton beneath her own yoke, was widening the breach between him and Maude. For a moment Miss Mangerston felt that she must call Miss Riversley's attention to her renegade lover, but a glance sufficed to show that was quite unnecessary. Women, on these occasions, number as many eyes as there are in a peacock's tail, and can see through the backs of their heads with marvellous clearness. The shrewd Caroline looked with much satisfaction at the result of her evening's work, as she watched Ethel flirting furiously with Hainton, and Maude giving the utmost encouragement to Sir Frederick, and felt that the two girls were both bent upon the discomfiture of the Squire of Enderly, who had committed the unpardonable offence of once forgetting that he had been engaged to valse with her, Caroline Mangerston.

One other also looked on at these proceedings with mute amazement, and that was Ralph Leslie. He knew both girls well, and loved them, though not precisely in similar fashion. He would have pledged his life that neither of them were a coquette, and yet, here they were both embarked in reckless flirtations, which he felt certain contained no particle of reality in them. Were they bitten by the tarantula of coquetry, and impelled to plunge into it as the heroine of the Spanish legend was to whirl pirouettes and compass demi-voltes. The Colonel was completely puzzled. He believed thoroughly in the honesty and purity of good women; had never read, and would never have subscribed to Diderot's scathing analysis of the sex.

"Impenetrable in dissimulation, cruel in vengeance, tenacious in their designs, without scruples about the means of success, animated by a deep and secret hatred against the despotism of man, it seems as if there were among them a sort of league, such as exists among the priests of all nations."

There may be a good bit of truth in all this, but it is not a pleasant belief to go through the world with.





## CHAPTER XXV.

### ARTHUR'S EMBASSY.

**W**HEN John Hainton awoke the next morning, it was with no jubilant recollections of conquest. He could recollect, it was true, a slight pressure of the hand and a soft glance of farewell from the heiress, but what were these against Maude's haughty bend in the cloak-room! The glamour of the lights, music, and the salve to his wounded vanity, might intoxicate him for the moment, but he was far too clear-headed, strong-minded a man, to impose upon himself the next day. He knew very well that, handsome as she was, he cared nothing about Ethel, and he made no disguise to himself that he did care a very great deal about Maude—and—well he supposed he was mistaken, but he had thought she fancied him a little, at all events.

And now she was going to marry that sallow-faced cousin of hers—d—n him—and the latter ejaculation escaped John Hainton's lips with a fervour that would have been edifying to listen to, had a blessing been invoked. What should he do? how had he got all wrong with Miss Riversley? Bah! the explanation was simple; during his absence there had turned up the probability of becoming "my lady," and the wife to a man whose income about equalled his own. Did not everybody, that is in London, tell him that it was so? does not all fiction dwell upon the time-honoured topic, although oftentimes putting

things right at the finish, in order to enlist the sympathies of the reader? Of course, girls married for position nowadays, and, if the bargain was not clenched, how could you blame them if they sealed and signed with a better opportunity on its being offered? He would call and upbraid her with her perfidy, and then he ruefully thought of last night's proceedings, and became dimly conscious that he might get the worst of such argument. No, he would be off at once; go to Ireland or Iceland, or some other country, not popular with tourists, and forget her. Much given to crude belief in absence as a curative process, some of these sore-stricken ones, and in one sense it is wont to prove a success, even should they fail to forget they can always look forward hopefully to being forgotten, and that, at all events, should prove an anodyne.

And how, in the meantime, was it with Maude? She vowed to herself that she never wished to see John Hainton again—that he had behaved with shameful discourtesy, to say the least of it; that he was nothing to her; but, if it was so, why did she feel so utterly miserable, discontented with herself, and wonder how Ethel could go on in the way she did? Then her face flushed and her brow clouded, as she thought of how warmly her cousin had responded to the encouragement she had given him last night. Yes, she knew the challenge to flirtation that she had thrown out, from motives of jealousy, had been met more than half way by Sir Frederick, and a vague idea dawned across her mind, that she should be involved in trouble concerning that misapprehension. Our dull masculine understandings rarely take in the why of a young woman, making herself out-of-the-way agreeable to us. It may be to annoy, and very often is, somebody else; it may be, if we've made some mark in the world, to gratify her vanity, by showing that our scalp also may decorate her girdle if she pleases; it may be from caprice; it may be from *ennui*; it may be because she dreads being seen sitting out a dance by herself; but it very rarely is from any particular admiration of ourselves. "If we have more reason than women have, they have far more instinct than we have," quoth the French philosopher, and we are a long way off comprehending

the motives that sway their proceedings for the most part.

Nor was Ethel Clothele altogether satisfied with her last night's work. She, as haughty a girl as ever breathed, knew that she had in some measure stooped to solicit a man's love—a man who, far from having won her esteem even, had incurred her bitterest contempt. She faltered not an iota in her scheme of vengeance; but she was fain to confess that she would have to tread the dirty paths of simulation and hypocrisy to compass her design. And further, it was not quite clear to her that she should not occasion an estrangement from her great friend, Maude Riversley: temporary, of course; and yet Ethel, if she had thought it over deeply, might have remembered that her sex, from days "*lang syne*," had ill brooked interference from their compeers with what they regarded as their own belongings. A woman may be quite tired of a lover, but, at the same time, fiercely resent his appropriation by another. Her captive may have escaped her thrall, and she be careless of the fact; but she never believes that it is not within her power to reassert her sway, and is apt to view any attempt of her sisters to subjugate the wanderer as a species of poaching on her manor. A girl like Maude, veritably in love, I think would prefer the punishment of the culprit left to herself, but, at all events, would hardly listen to Ethel's scheme with complacency.

As for Miss Mangerston, she, to speak figuratively, kept throwing sixes all through the evening. Everything fell out beyond her possible expectations. She had thoroughly detached Maude and John Hainton, and had, at all events, laid the foundation of a permanent estrangement between the former and Ethel. Looking back upon what she had already achieved, the conclusion of the drama seemed to Caroline Mangerston easy of accomplishment. Once put close friends into discordant keys, and it were ludicrous, if it were not painful, to think how easily a mischievous tongue can rend an old attachment.

"Alas! they had been friends in youth;  
But whispering tongues will poison truth."

Do not the fights of our childhood begin in this wise?

and does not John Nokes seek to try conclusions with Tommy Stokes, because malignant tongues whisper into his ear that Stokes has expressed his ability to punch his, Nokes', head whenever it shall so please him?

Miss Clothele's party upon the whole can hardly be said to have been fraught with pleasure to herself and her most intimate friend.

But that Sir Frederick, as he emerged from his bath next morning—man is usually personally reflective at that time—should have, not fairy visions, for he was long past that, but sanguine hopes, is not much to be wondered at.

Maude had never been so kind to him as yet; and, as I said before, we do not always comprehend why it pleaseth the "Queen of Beauty" to bestow her glove upon us. The arguments he had used to Arthur were sound, and there could be no denying that Sir Frederick, aged about five-and-thirty, and with five thousand a year of his own, had good right to regard himself as an eligible *parti* for a young lady in Maude's position. He determined to strike while the iron was hot, and thought, as he brushed his hair, that Arthur should receive his instructions to act as ambassador at once.

Why did a cynical man, with a keen money-making eye, desire to wed a portionless maiden?—and Maude's dowry was scarce likely to be more than modest.

Cynic though he might be, the baronet felt that there should be somebody to come after him and inherit the title and estates. Lustful of money he might be, but yet he was no miser; keen to acquire it, keener still to get the worth of every sovereign he spent—with, if possible, a trifle to boot; but he did not shrink from the outlay of the sovereign. He started by looking for a wife with money, and found himself hawked at for his own. A little bored by conventional London young ladies on promotion, who persistently talked the jargon of the season to a man who had not as yet time to pick up the threads of it, Sir Frederick suddenly came across his cousin Maude. He made up his mind quickly. She was a very pretty sensible girl, and, if she brought no money, she had not been accustomed to extravagant expenditure. If he could have her for his wife he would. He was not in love with her.

I don't say that his day for love was gone by, because till the grave has closed over him it is impossible to say of any man that his day for that, or its fac simile, infatuation, is finished. The whimsies of dotage are as manifold as sad. But Sir Frederick was very much in earnest, and with his experiences, that was perhaps as much as you could expect of him now. You may, as a general rule, rely upon it, that a man who is a confirmed gambler has slender capacity for real love—capacity for great self-sacrifice occasionally. I can thoroughly believe in Bret Harte's story of "The Outcasts of Poker Flat," though not in that of John Hamlin's love affair.

Whatever he might have been in his early days, Sir Frederick was no sluggard in the morning now. Whatever hours he might keep at night, ten saw him at the breakfast table in this period of his prosperity, and Arthur Riversley was aroused from his slumbers a little after eleven, with an intimation that his cousin was in the sitting-room, and waiting to see him.

"What the devil does he want?" muttered Arthur, in momentary oblivion of their secret contract.

Although he had been present at Miss Clothele's dance the night previous, he had left before supper to fulfil another engagement, and was consequently in complete ignorance of Hainton's reappearance and the further events of the evening; very possible he would have comprehended little of what was going on had he remained.

Men do overlook their sisters' love affairs in most surprising fashion, albeit the sisters seldom overlook their brothers' if they come within their ken. Arthur plunged into his bath, slipped into his dressing-gown, and then proceeded to give his cousin an audience, what he was wanted for dawning upon him as he indulged in the first salutary operation. He felt a little nervous about opening this matter to his sister, for, plausible as Sir Frederick might look in the eyes of the world as a suitor, he had a strong inward conviction that he would not be quite acceptable to Maude. He was, after his fashion, very fond of his eldest sister, and would have been loth to persuade her to anything that he did not deem conducive to her happiness; but a season in London rather breeds contempt for

anything but well-arranged marriages. And then he was urgently in want of two thousand pounds, or thereabouts ; and again, he had already accepted a retainer for the plaintiff.

Sir Frederick's directions were clear, concise, and strictly to the point. He expected Arthur to break his intentions to Maude, using every argument in his, Sir Frederick's, favour that he could bring to mind, and then to talk to the Rev. Mortimer and his wife upon the subject.

"I don't suppose, Arthur, that your sister is very much in love with me—I can't expect that ; but she was very pleasant and sociable last night—quite as much so as a man who has not definitely declared himself has a right to expect, except in a regular case of 'spoon.' She will make a very charming wife, and I can give her a position she is thoroughly fitted for. We shall understand each other better later on, no doubt. In the meantime, your mission is to break ground for me without delay, and I am quite ready to advance formal proposals as soon as you report the way cleared for me. Good-bye ; I shall expect to hear from you this evening, and if your duns really are troublesome, the sooner things are settled the better for you."

Arthur Riversley, as he meditated on his task after his cousin's departure, did not feel particularly comfortable concerning it. He was endowed with one of those soft, sensuous natures that instinctively shrink from everything that threatens to be arduous or unpleasant—not deficient in animal courage in the least, nor even in moral courage when driven to the wall. Like the rat in the corner, they will fight hard then ; but it is not till they are actually in the corner that such men ever show they have grit in them. He did not like what was before him, but he felt it was imperative upon him to urge his cousin's proposal upon Maude with all the ability in his power. Speciously as he might disguise it to himself, he still knew at the bottom of his heart that he was about to endeavour to persuade his sister to pay his debts by consenting to this marriage. He had been weak, vain, extravagant, but he had not yet arrived at that state of supreme selfishness when man feels no compunctions at demanding sacrifices from friends or relations, and very little gratitude for such immolation.

He sauntered slowly down to Curzon Street about luncheon-time. He knew that if he found his sister at home, he could depend upon having her to himself for half-an-hour after that meal in the dining-room. After last night's revel, he thought, she would probably be there. He was perfectly right in his conjecture; but it was impossible to overlook Maude's jaded appearance. The girl looked tired, worn out, fagged to death—she, too, who could dance all Clumford down, and look fresh as a rose at the breakfast-table next morning.

"This won't do, mother," said Arthur, after greeting her formally; "you'll have to get back to Clumbershire before worse comes of it. Why, here's Maudie lost all her country bloom, and looking as played out as the veteran of a dozen seasons."

"Don't talk nonsense, Arthur," replied the young lady. "I danced perhaps a little too much, stayed perhaps a little too late, and own to not feeling up to much to-day. But you weren't kept on escort duty, remember."

"No," replied her brother, gently. "It would have been better, perhaps, if I had been, and warned you to come home sooner. Don't get touchy, I am honestly sorry to see you look as if you had had a little too much of it."

The girl smiled faintly as she replied, "I'm afraid you're right, Arthur, and I a little overdid it last night."

"Ah, I shall expect you to take considerably more care of me next season, when I make my *debut*," said Miss Bessie."

"And discover how seldom brothers are to be depended upon for such services. You, too, Miss Untameable, why it would take a strong eleven to look after you when you get your innings."

"And don't fret yourself but what I shall have them," replied Bessie, saucily :

"For oh! Maggie's lovers came trooping  
Gallantly over the lea,  
Prancing and tilting and whooping,  
Their ain bonnie Maggie to see; "

and concluding the above stanza with a light laugh, and sweeping Arthur a mock courtesy, Miss Bessie danced out

of the room. A few minutes more and Maude and her brother were left alone.

"I'm afraid you didn't like your evening, last night," said Arthur; "which is hard, because, if it was not pleasant to yourself, you undoubtedly made it very pleasant to somebody else."

"What do you mean?" inquired Miss Riversley.

"Simply that I have come here to-day as an ambassador. I bring you an offer of marriage."

"From whom?" exclaimed Maude, in a low voice.

"From a most eligible candidate, one who in a social position is unimpeachable. I don't think any man half good enough for you, Maude, but, practically I doubt whether you may ever have the chance to do better."

"Who is he?" asked the girl, with feverish anxiety. She was yet clinging to the hope that, despite all appearances, John Hainton might have deputed her brother to break the ice for him.

"Your cousin, Sir Frederick," returned Arthur, quietly, and he watched his sister narrowly, to see how she took the announcement.

"Frederick! Why I haven't known him six weeks."

"That matters little. Men often make their minds up rapidly on these points. He knows that he labours under all the disadvantages of a short acquaintance, which is one reason why I am speaking to you instead of himself."

"I knew that he had lived abroad, but I did not conceive that he had become so oriental in his habits as to deem he had only to throw his handkerchief," rejoined Maude, sharply.

"Don't talk nonsense," said Arthur, "men fall in love and propose quickly when they really mean it, for fear some other fellow should be shoving his oar in; besides, Fred seemed to think he had received reasonable encouragement."

Last night's dance flashed across Maude, and she coloured to the roots of her hair, as she recalled all those after-supper cross-purposes. It was too true; for ends of her own she had smiled very sweetly on the baronet—there was no denying it; but she did not mean to marry him.



"Ah, well," she said at length, "I plead guilty to a ball-room flirtation, no more, and you must explain that to him, Arthur. He ought to know the London world well enough to understand that we don't pledge ourselves to accept the men we give half the after-supper dances to, and sit out on the stairs with, as partners for life. You know what to say—'Profoundly impressed with honour he's done me, trust we shall be good friends, as cousins, &c.'"

"But I think I had better not give your message just yet. Consider, Maude, 'Lady Riversley,' with a fair income, can easily be somebody in the London world."

"Very likely, but I don't wish to marry Fred. I don't particularly dislike him; I don't care about him, either one way or the other."

"Pray think over it. Fred's a match a good many girls in your shoes would jump at. He's better than Hainton would be, for instance."

"How dare you drag Mr. Hainton's name into the matter," cried Maude, with flaming cheeks, as she sprang from her chair. "What is he to me? and why should you suppose there was ever anything between us?"

"Well, I am afraid we all fell into the same mistake as Fred, and thought that a big share of the after-supper dances and interminable sittings out on the stairs augured affinities," replied Arthur, dryly. "Fred thinks you have given him encouragement. We thought you had done that to Hainton."

"Then all I can say is, I wish you would not trouble your head about my affairs, but confine your speculations to your own."

"Don't be cross, Maude. I assure you thinking over my own troubles is the most unsatisfactory way of spending a morning I know of. I wish to Heaven you could like Frederick, and if you don't care about Hain—I mean about anybody else, I can't see why you should not. It is a most eligible offer, you must admit."

Miss Riversley turned her head quickly as she said, "And in what will this marriage benefit you?"

"I never said it would do so," returned Arthur, with some little embarrassment.

"I know you did not, but I fancy, my brother, you have some interest in being Sir Frederick's advocate, and I mean to know what it is. Tell me or not, as you like, but never think a woman will fail to discover a thing of that sort when she has once suspected it."

"I don't see that it would be against such a marriage, that it benefited me," returned Arthur, doggedly; "but I am merely pointing out what every one else will tell you, namely, that Frederick is a good *parti* for you."

"Quite so, and if it does good to you, so much the better. I am only curious to know, Arthur, how much it concerns you."

"In this wise, as you insist upon knowing; Fred promises to be a much better brother-in-law to me than he does cousin. Still, Maude, I would not advocate his suit for a moment if I did not honestly believe that he was a good match for you."

"As a paid advocate," retorted the girl, bitterly, "you could say no less. Tell your principal that the honour is respectfully declined."

"I can't give Frederick such a message as that, quite," replied the young man, diplomatically. "You must soften it a little, Maude."

"How can I? I have no other answer to give than 'No.' I authorise you to wrap it in silver paper, at your own discretion."

"Thank you, that is good of you. I can't afford a rupture with Fred just now. You will allow me to say that you will give him an answer in two or three days—that you are taken by surprise, never thought of him in that light," &c.

"Absurd, Arthur; that is holding out hopes which you know I have no intention of realising. He deserves straightforward treatment. Give him my answer, civilly couched."

"I shall, but you have empowered me to judge how that is to be done, and I prefer to do as I have said. Do not be afraid that I will commit you."

"You will, if you don't make him understand that his suit is hopeless. I was foolish not to keep the matter in my own hands, and refuse you my permission to convey

more than a polite negative. You cannot expect me to purchase you Frederick's good offices at the price of my life's happiness," said Maude, rising.

"I have given up expecting anything to my benefit for some months past," replied her brother, gravely. "Girls in our world, as you know, don't invariably marry for love; and I have simply advocated the claims of an extremely eligible candidate for your hand. I don't see why you should rush into high-flown language about my demanding the sacrifice of your life's happiness. I only ask you to let me say to him, 'No,' gently."

"I'll argue with you no more," cried Maude, hotly. "I know I'm right in the main, cleverly as you gloze it over. But remember my 'No' is spoken in earnest," and, so saying, she swept from the room.

Arthur leisurely picked up his hat and gloves, and sauntered out into the street. He was not altogether dissatisfied with his morning's work. He had never expected that his sister would accede to Sir Frederick's proposal, in the first instance, and rightly judged that the temporising answer he had obtained permission to deliver, was a point in his favour. It gave time to bring parental pressure to bear, and the urging of various other inducements conducive to the result he would fain bring about. Maude must be made to say "Yes," for were not his pecuniary difficulties becoming more imperative day by day?





## CHAPTER XXVI.

### DIPLOMATIC DOINGS.

**A**LTHOUGH John Hainton in the first moment of his disappointment might meditate leaving London, with a view to forgetting the cause of his trouble, yet it is needless to say that he speedily re-considered this determination. He would, at all events, see Maude once more, and learn from her own lips in what way he had incurred her displeasure. Girls took fancies at times, he knew; unless the world was right, and that in this case the fancy was for another, a good understanding might be still come to between them: anyway it was easy to learn from the family if Sir Frederick was an accepted suitor. Imbued with these ideas he wended his way to Curzon Street. Mrs. Riversley *was* at home, and he was speedily ushered into her drawing-room.

“Welcome back again, Mr. Hainton; Maude told us the other night that you had returned from your mysterious wanderings; we are all dying of curiosity to know where you have been, and why you have been away.”

“I have been to America, you must know, on very urgent business, which I luckily brought to a fortunate conclusion; but where is Miss Riversley? I had no opportunity of talking to her at Miss Clothele’s dance, and I am anxious to give her some account of my adventures.”

Mrs. Riversley touched the bell, and desired the servant who answered her summons to let Miss Riversley know that Mr. Hainton was in the drawing-room. He returned with an intimation that Miss Riversley was suffering from a bad headache, and begged Mr. Hainton would excuse her.

John Hainton drew his own deductions; he knew what headaches meant in Society, and felt that this was a polite "Not-at-home," as far as he was concerned.

"I had hoped," he observed, "to offer my congratulations in person. I presume what I hear everywhere is true, and that Miss Riversley is about to become Lady Riversley."

It was with a smile of exultation that the matron replied, It was only the day before that she had learned from Arthur of Sir Frederick's proposals, and heard also that Maude had consented to postpone her negative for a day or two. "You know the London world, Mr. Hainton," she said, "it always will talk, but I can assure you we have made no announcement of that kind even to our intimates."

And even as she spoke, the elation visible on her face told John Hainton that, although it might not be as yet announced to the world, yet the engagement was at least in contemplation. The good lady, indeed, was not sorry to be able to flourish such pact in his face. She held strenuously, like many of Maude's friends, that he had no business to rush abroad without having asked the question that was to be expected of him.

"I must not be indiscreet," he replied, "but trust as an old friend to have early intelligence when you do publish it."

Some little more desultory conversation, and then John Hainton took his leave, amply avenged, as the street door slammed behind him, if he but knew it. That sound sent a pang of bitter regret through Maude's bosom as she heard it. She felt that she had refused an opportunity for explanation, and it might be the sole opportunity that would ever be vouchsafed her for hearing if Hainton had anything to say in extenuation of his abrupt departure from England, and of discovering whether his

feelings remained unchanged towards her. Then she thought passionately, that after that evening at Prince's Gate, there could be little doubt but what Caroline Mangerston was right in her conclusions.

The girl's mind was in a whirl of contending emotions, now believing in her lover's good faith, and then convinced by what her own eyes had seen, and others had told her. Her instinct told her rightly, that the interview she had just shrunk from would have probably made things clear; and yet from pique she had positively declined it. She felt, too, that she had been guilty of imprudence in allowing Arthur's specious pleading to prevail upon her. She ought to have insisted that Sir Frederick should have his answer at once. It was absurd, softening her refusal by pretending to think over it. Her mind was made up, and the sooner her cousin was made aware of it the better. Conducted as Arthur proposed, Sir Frederick would have fair grounds for expecting an affirmative. Though she was resolute in her determination that it never should be, yet she reflected that girls before now have been drawn into awkward entanglements by such irresolute replies. Well! things were out of her guidance now, and she could simply insist that Arthur at the end of forty-eight hours should be very clear and definite about the answer of which he was the bearer.

John Hainton strolled away from Curzon Street, taking the intelligence he had acquired with no little acerbity; he had no thought now of going abroad. It was all true; and the Club smoking-rooms spoke rightly. It was the old story; girls were all alike, and invariably selected the biggest strawberry to be found in the basket. Well! he was not going to break his heart about it. Better far to take the goods the gods provide, and prosecute his flirtation with handsome Ethel Clothele. There was a good month left yet in which to sip the sweets of the season, and he would make the most of it. Henceforth there should be no gayer man in London than John Hainton.

The consequence of all these social forces was inevitable. Ethel, pursuing her flirtation and scheme of vengeance, naturally drifted wider and wider apart from her friend. It was sure to be so. Maude, of course,

shrank from meeting Hainton, and it was now not easy to be much in Miss Clothele's society without encountering that gentleman. Even the London world began at last to deem the heiress's hour was come, and that she who might have aspired to a coronet was about to content herself with a plain country gentleman.

"Lamentable, my dear!" exclaimed Lady Crackemthorpe, "a fair match enough, I grant you, for most girls; but that Ethel Clothele with her chances, should take up with a mere country squire, is the most shocking instance of neglected opportunities that I ever remember to have witnessed."

Miss Mangerston, it need be scarcely said, did her utmost to harden Ethel in her scheme of retribution. It was all so easy for the fair Caroline, now. She, naturally, saw but little of Maude, compared to what she had done; but she made the most of those few occasions upon which they did meet, and never failed to enlarge upon Hainton's devotion to the heiress. There was small need, however, for her to carry such news to Maude. There were plenty of people to comment upon that, and who spoke openly of it as one of *the* arranged matches of the season; and, to say the truth, Maude most thoroughly believed them. Puzzled as she was by her friend's sudden caprice, the old faith in her was too strong to let her believe that Ethel was only amusing herself. She would not believe that the proud straightforward Ethel Clothele could be giving a man such marked encouragement as she was bestowing upon John Hainton, unless she purposed giving him her hand when he should feel emboldened to claim it. Unless, indeed, Caroline Mangerston was right, and Hainton was one of those who made love to every pretty girl he came across.

"Then, again," she argued, "my case and Ethel's are very different. My hand was no great catch, except a man loved me; but Ethel, with her wealth and beauty, is a prize to be snatched at." And then she thought again: "And yet Frederick, who has greater advantages to offer his bride than John Hainton has, at all events deemed me worth the wooing."

If there was one thing that impressed itself on Maude's

mind at this time, it was how well Sir Frederick bore his disappointment. He still continued frequently to visit in Curzon Street, and if he carried himself somewhat as an accepted suitor, it was with this difference, he never once by word or manner gave Maude herself the slightest reason to believe that he considered himself so. She inquired of Arthur if he had given her reply to her cousin, and that gentleman replied jesuitically that Sir Frederick had had his answer; but the fact was, that Arthur Riversley was too desperately embarrassed to put an end to such an opportunity of extrication as would occur to him in the event of Sir Frederick's marriage with his sister. The bribe that his cousin had dangled before his eyes was too great a temptation to be withstood. He certainly had given Sir Frederick her reply, but it had been by no means such as the girl had dictated to him; he had told the baronet that Maude was taken by surprise, that she could not make her mind up at present, that if he asked for a positive Yes or No at the present moment there could be very little doubt about his being refused. He exhorted him to have a little patience. "A few weeks longer, and I will undertake to say it will be as you wish."

"You see," he said, "Maude is not quite a conventional society young lady; she will not take you just because you happen to be a good match, unless she honestly thinks that she could make you a good wife. She is not as yet in love with you. Indeed, considering the short time you have known each other, it is hardly to be expected that she should be."

"It's very possible," answered the baronet, "that she may never be so. Many marriages that turn out very well start from no more than a mutual liking, while we have all seen love matches end in the Divorce Court. I am quite content to take her without overmuch protestation on her part, if she will only say me 'Yes.'"

And so, thanks to Arthur's duplicity, Maude and Sir Frederick were, in some measure, playing at cross purposes. While the lady thought that he thoroughly understood that the honour of his hand had been declined, and was admiring the tact and good humour with which he had bowed to his fate, and subsided into a cousinly



position, the baronet was regarding himself as merely on probation; not, certainly, an accepted suitor, but thoroughly entitled to hope shortly to become so. All this was naturally calculated to make Maude look with a favourable eye on her would-be lover. Then, again, her mother was continually urging upon her how foolish she would be to reject such an eligible opportunity of establishing herself. That any explanation now could ever take place between herself and Hainton seemed to Maude an impossibility. Even if he could have explained his abrupt departure from England, still how could he possibly justify his neglect of her, and his open devotion to Ethel Clothele? No! she was more likely to hear their engagement formally announced than that John Hainton should seek to exonerate himself in her eyes.

It was now some three weeks since Arthur had first communicated the baronet's proposals to her. He lounged in one day at luncheon-time, as was his wont when he wanted to have a confidential talk with his sister. He waited till the conclusion of the meal, and when they at length had the room to themselves, said—

“I want to have a real talk with you, Maude. I am in a very serious mess, and it happens to rest with you to get me out of it.”

“With me!” she exclaimed. “It is nothing worse, surely, than these miserable debts.”

“Nothing worse, indeed!” If you were only dunned with the persistency that I am, I fancy that you would think that nothing could be much worse.”

“But what can I do to help you in this case? I cannot pay them for you, you know. I have already recommended you to make a clean breast of it to papa. You will have to, believe me, sooner or later; and oh, Arthur, what is the use of postponing the evil day? He may scold—indeed, I have no doubt he will—but he will set you straight with the world. You cannot expect him to be anything but angry at having to pay so much money for you.”

“That fathers should growl when they have to pay their sons' debts, is an immutable law of nature,” he rejoined, grimly. “It is the privilege of the man with

money, and the penalty of the man without ; but I don't see the necessity of my enduring the torments on this occasion. If you could but be a sensible girl, Maude, my debts would be easily settled without having recourse to my father."

"A sensible girl? What can you mean? You are speaking in riddles."

"I mean this," he returned, sullenly, "that my brother-in-law would pay my debts, without question."

"And this, then, was how Sir Frederick's proposition was to benefit you—the payment of these miserable liabilities was the price of your advocacy. Arthur! Arthur! I did think better of you than this. I did think my happiness would have weighed more with you than escape from your entanglements."

"And you have no right to say still that it does not. I'll admit, if you like, that I am paid to plead Frederick's cause. Put that on one side, and I could still most conscientiously do so. Why can you not accept him? I'll not go over the old ground again, but you know he offers an excellent home, and is suitable in every way."

"I do not love him," she replied, curtly.

"Perhaps not ; but, believe me, the generality of people don't marry for love nowadays. You like him, and the love will come afterwards. He is not in his first youth, and he's got over the romantic epoch of life."

She looked at him for a moment with an arch smile, and then said—

"My poor Arthur! I shall hardly look to learning the philosophy of life from your teaching."

"But," he continued, "the world has already given you to him ; people talk about your engagement as a settled fact ; and even Fred himself half thinks that it will be so."

There was very little archness in her face now. It was with set brows that she asked quickly—

"Did you give him my answer? Did you explain to him that it never could be?"

"I told him that he was not likely to get a favourable hearing under present circumstances. But listen to me, Maude ; if he does not get an affirmative before the week

is out, I am ruined ! I shall either be in jail, or must fly the country. I bid fair," he continued, bitterly, "to take up Fred's life abroad where he laid it down, to become a vagrant over the Continent on such pittance as it may please the Rev. Mortimer Riversley to vouchsafe me. George Latimer's will must have been invented solely for my undoing. It has been the cause of all my embarrassments. If it had not been for that, I should never have been in the scrape I am."

Not quite a true rendering of the case. The distant prospect of inheriting the Latimer estates had no doubt fostered the inherent extravagance of Arthur Riversley; and, while that visionary prospect remained to him, there was no doubt but what Society had combined to persuade him that he was heir to a largish property; but, in reality, he had principally only his own weakness to thank for the position in which he found himself.

"And you expect me to save you by sacrificing myself."

"I cannot see any sacrifice about it," he returned.

"Arthur, you have behaved infamously—you have deceived me, you have deceived your cousin, and you now wind up by deceiving yourself. Since I find it is useless to trust to you, I will explain matters to Fred myself. He will doubtless be no more obliged to you than I am for the duplicity with which you have treated us."

As far as the baronet was concerned, he was not much deceived as to the position in which he stood; Arthur had been far clearer with him than he dared be with his sister, and he was a great deal too shrewd a man not to guess that though Arthur, in his own interests, might palliate his account of things, his suit had met with most decided disapprobation. But then he was thoroughly in earnest—and his old gambling instincts and cynical knowledge of mankind stood him in good stead now. He knew that the woman who can be persuaded not to give a decided "No," is still to be won. He rather preferred a *rusé* game to a straightforward one; it came more natural to him to obtain his desires rather by intrigue than in direct fashion. He meant to marry Maude; but that her consent was only to be obtained by some little *finesse* and subterfuge, amused him rather than otherwise. He neither expected nor

wished that she should be in love with him. He wanted a wife with an end to an heir. Now he had come into the title, and had become a man of landed estates, he felt anxious that there should be a child of his own to succeed him. He could, at all events, depend upon himself not to squander the Latimer lands, as his own father had done Bunnington. He looked in a wife for a pretty, lady-like woman, who would be a companion to him, and who was not saturated with the conventional jargon of society. The London society of the present day, with that flavour of fastness, so extremely popular just now with a large section of it, was vapid in the extreme to a man who had spent years in the country of Bohemia. What was gambling in hundreds compared to gambling for your dinner? He had played with his honour depending upon the dexterity of his fingers, when clumsiness meant exposure, and when one was but too happy if a dispute could be settled by the arbitration of the pistol. Society in London, in short, was to him but as "the lilies and languors of virtue," as compared with "the raptures and roses of vice." In fact, when you have learned to drink neat brandy, amontillado is flavourless and insipid.

Having devoted the springtime of life to revel and extravagance, its early summer to shifts, expedients, and practices not good to look back upon, he resolved to devote its noontide to money-making and respectability. To turn water-drinker is certainly the greatest change an habituated inebriate can arrive at. I don't go so far as to say that Sir Frederick intended to fly from the nadir of vice to the zenith of austerity, but he had come to the determination to what our French neighbours terms *rangé* himself. Whether dabbling on the turf and the Stock Exchange, by way of money-making, was likely to be as conducive to the acquisition of riches as his marriage with Maude to the acquirement of respectability and domestic virtues, time only can determine.



## CHAPTER XXVII.

LADY RIVERSLEY.

**I**T would, I think, astound most of us to find how much those habitually about us know regarding our affairs; take servants, for instance: they are aware of intimacies which we thought utterly without their knowledge; they know of unpaid bills, the non-settlement of which occasions us considerable annoyance by reason of our creditors' importunities. They do not, to the best of our belief, read our letters, but they seem intuitively to know whence they come and what are their contents. You have some ugly secret, which you have carefully hidden from your best and truest friend. Dear me! He has known all about it these last ten years, and you might have eased your mind many times, by talking the business over with him, without the pain of confession. This being so habitually the case with our surroundings, it need scarcely be said that Sir Frederick's matrimonial project was not likely to escape a man holding the confidential position of Solano; and that gentleman pondered somewhat seriously as to how this would affect his own interests. He certainly had no desire to see the baronet under the dominion of a woman. He could influence him at present to a limited extent, and trusted in course of time to considerably strengthen such hold as he had upon him. He shrewdly conjectured that there were circumstances in Fred Riversley's former career which

that gentleman would not wish to see the light of day. We most of us commit follies in our youth, and more especially when we accomplish as complete a smash as the baronet had formerly achieved. If he could but find a clue to this Marion Gardiner, for whom Sir Frederick had told him to make such diligent search, and the giving of which commission he seemed to have repented with almost equal celerity, he had little doubt but that he should acquire a grip of some sort. A woman mixed up in a man's early life, and about whose whereabouts, years later, he becomes solicitous, has, it may be fairly assumed, claims upon him which he is either anxious to evade or to compromise. Solano, in spite of his employer's intimation that he might abandon the search, had pursued it with the utmost pertinacity. Vainly, so far; but Solano was as dogged and untiring as a hungry wolf in quest of prey when on the tract of a secret of such description as he conceived might possibly be connected with Marion Gardiner.

He argued with himself, and with considerable acuteness, that Sir Frederick, once married, whatever relations he might have held with this woman in bygone days, the discovery could not so much affect him as when it contained the possibility of preventing his marriage altogether. Still, he felt that it would be useless to oppose the contemplated arrangement. It might not, after all, take place, and, although he determined to neglect no opportunity that might arise to, if possible, prevent it, he resolved to be a mere looker-on as things were at present. More clear to him than ever now, that he must trace out Marion Gardiner.

Miss Clothel's flirtation with John Hainton, as I before said, attracted much attention in society, and by no two men was it viewed with more disfavour than by Lord Lithfield and Ralph Leslie. Ethel, perfectly unintentionally, had called the Viscount's attention sharply to the fact that he had drifted tranquilly into love, and he now regarded Hainton with unmitigated disgust as a man striving to rob him of his chosen bride. It need scarcely be said that he had no grounds whatever for taking this view of the situation. He had paid court to Ethel in the

usual languid manner with which he habitually pursued most pretty women he came across; though she undoubtedly was entitled to number him amongst the band of her admirers, yet he had never spoken words that gave him claim to occupy any higher position than that. It is very often the case that men do not awake to a woman's charms until they find another anxiously contending for their possession. It was not till he thought that Ethel was in a fair way to become Hainton's wife that Lithfield suddenly discovered that he wanted her as his own. In short, the Viscount was suffering from a tolerably sharp attack of jealousy.

With Ralph Leslie the case was different. He never had any doubt about his own feelings, although he had never ventured to express them. He knew, and had known for a long time, that he loved Ethel Clothele passionately. He had no intention of declaring that love. What had he, a battered old soldier, to offer a girl like Ethel? What right had he, at his age, to suppose for one instant that he could win a beauty and an heiress for his bride? He disliked the idea of her marrying Hainton, not from any dislike of Hainton himself, but the idea of her marrying at all was extremely distasteful to him. Hainton, he thought, in his heart, by no means a bad fellow. Not good enough, of course, for Ethel Clothele, but then, who was? And so, with that magnificent disregard of all practical considerations so eminently characteristic of a man smitten with love's fitful fever, he deemed that Ethel ought to be left to the admiration of her worshippers generally, and not to become the property of any one of them individually.

Maude adhered to the firm determination she had expressed to Arthur, and rapidly realised that her anticipations of difficulty about extricating herself from the meshes in which his double dealing had involved her were only too true. Sir Frederick, of course, had heard from Arthur that Maude intended to have an explanation with him, and to make him clearly understand that no engagement was possible between them, and this, most assuredly, was what Maude intended should be the result of that interview.

"It was no fault of mine, Frederick," she said to him, "that you were not definitely told, when you first did me the honour to ask my hand, that it could not be. It was most unfortunate that you did not ask the question of myself. An ambassador is never to be quite trusted to tell the truth clearly, especially as when, in Arthur's case ——" and here she stopped abruptly, as she remembered how impossible it was for her to allude to the bribe which had been promised her brother for undertaking this task. "Especially, I mean," she continued, with a slight stammer, "when, as in Arthur's case, he never is particularly clear about delivering a message."

"I certainly regret that I have been under a misunderstanding so far, Maude, but, as it has been so, I am going to ask you to let me in some measure remain so. Allow me to still think a little longer that I have not had my answer."

"Impossible," she said. "You will have a right to reproach me if I allow you any longer to remain in so false a belief."

"No, but hear me!" he cried. "You do owe me some slight compensation for the cruel mistake of which I have been the victim. All I ask is that you shall let things remain as they are till you go back to Clumford. It is but a very little time longer, and, without giving any necessity for treating me with coldness, I think I can promise that you will never be annoyed by the repetition of that question unless I feel that I have far better grounds upon which to expect a favourable reply than I have as yet had."

What could the girl do? Her cousin had, as she thought, been shamefully deceived. It was so small a concession that he asked that, unwilling as she was to make it, it seemed hard upon him to refuse. Then, again, his behaviour, while he deemed himself under probation, had been so admirable that there could be no great harm in allowing it to continue for two or three weeks more.

"I still think it better not, Fred, but, if you like, it shall be as you will. It will be your own fault if I am compelled to change my manner towards you; but, be it clearly understood, that, when we leave town, with such



words on your part still unspoken, that no engagement is *possible* between us."

"Thank you for granting me this much," he replied. "Scanty hope, I'll admit, but when a man loves in earnest, Maude, he is thankful for even a crumb or two of encouragement."

"There, you see," she returned, gently, "already we trench upon the forbidden ground."

"It shall be my last offending, unless your own manner unmistakably bids me to speak," and, slightly pressing her hand, the baronet took his departure.

"He is very nice," Maude murmured to herself, "as a cousin. What a pity he cannot content himself with that relationship! Heigh ho!" she continued, with a sigh, "what a pity it is, all my family and friends will say, and Arthur in particular, that I cannot love him as a husband. It might have been, too, at one time, until I was fool enough to give my heart away to a man perfectly indifferent to its possession. Frederick may be in earnest, and I have no doubt he is, in his wish to marry me, but why he should make my hand the price for paying Arthur's debts, I am bound to say I cannot see."

Maude would scarcely have felt satisfied with the result of her concession, nor would she have thought by any means so highly of her cousin as she did at present, could she have overheard a slight conversation between her brother and Sir Frederick in the latter's drawing-room in Chesterfield Street.

"I did not do so badly!" exclaimed the baronet. "To have persuaded your sister to leave it an open question until we all leave town was no slight advantage—more, almost, than I could have hoped—and the result I consider profound diplomacy on my part. But the business must now be considerably in your hands. It is for you to turn on the whole weight of the parental pressure. Daughters, of course, don't marry to order in these days, but fathers and mothers can exercise a good deal of persuasion for all that. I know thoroughly what it means for a girl to be in disgrace at home. Life is made none too rosy under those circumstances. You, too, must plead my cause with all the argument you are master of. Remember, Master

Arthur, the retainer in your case is a pretty heavy one, and I am a man who look to have full value for my money. I directed Solano to inquire a little bit into your affairs."

"What the devil can he know about them, and what business are they of his?"

"For the matter of that, Solano would very quickly know a good deal about your or any one else's affairs that I told him to inquire into. He has means of acquiring such knowledge not to be understood by a young gentleman of your age. As to what business it is of his: as, in the event of my getting a favourable answer from your sister, he will have the settlement of them, it is just as well he should know something about them."

"But," said Arthur, drawing himself up with a feeble attempt at preserving his dignity, "I should prefer to settle them in my own person."

"Yes; and prettily plucked you would get in the operation," rejoined Sir Frederick, with a sneer. "No; when it comes to settling with the children of Israel, a guileless young Gentile like you is not of much use. Solano, believe me, understands the ways of the money-lenders a good deal better than you do."

Arthur was in no position to dictate terms. When the usurer is at the gate, our demurrers are generally couched in a minor key. It is not often Portia intervenes in Antonio's behalf, and, as a matter of reality, Shylock has it pretty much his own way, even as in days of yore. Our paternal and never-ending legislature, which interests itself not only concerning our way to heaven, but as to when, and upon what terms, we shall partake of either food, drink, or amusement, and that has decreed our Sabbaths shall be passed in prayer and sadness, has also determined that the lesser the sinner in the matter of ordering that for which he is unable to pay, the greater shall be his punishment. To be a defaulter in hundreds, is to be in no great trouble; but once let the petty tradesman get his victim in the County Court for a few pounds, and Shylock is a suckling babe in the art of usury compared to him. When paternal legislation has done exercising itself with insisting upon cramming our young working-

people with learning, it will perhaps undertake the profitable and laudable work of establishing the co-operative store for "the million." Much money in that idea for the promoters, and the discomfiture, annihilation, and general crushing out of that hideous human parasite "the tallyman."

Poor Maude ! Unless the fates interfered in her behalf, was it likely she would extricate herself from this petty conspiracy ? Nothing melo-dramatic or sensational about it whatever—a mere ordinary little social plot, such as goes on under our noses perpetually. An eligible proposal, strongly supported by the young lady's family ; a well-defined certainty that either money or interest, or both combined, will be required to start brothers in the world, topped up with a first love affair gone askew, and I am afraid the maiden of the nineteenth century will yield to her destiny as easily as her predecessors did in those earlier times when the yea or nay were virtually no whit at their own option. Mrs. Riversley would not have been intentionally unkind to her daughter ; she would have been the last woman in the world to persuade her into marrying a man whom she did not think calculated to make her happy. But it must be borne in mind that not only do mothers and daughters see things from very different points of view, but that in this case also Mrs. Mortimer and all her family were quite in the dark about Sir Frederick's real character. Further, the good lady was no little piqued that it should be said a girl of hers was left to wear the willow. It would be such a triumphant rejoinder to the world to announce that Maude, though not engaged to Mr. Hainton, as people had so long anticipated, was about to contract a more brilliant marriage. She was untiring in preaching advice to her daughter on this subject, by pointing out how foolish it would be of her to neglect the best opportunity of taking her place in society that might be ever afforded her. Apt to think a good deal too much of society, and society's verdicts, was Mrs. Mortimer. As for the rector, he only chorussed his wife's arguments, dwelling upon the perfections of his would-be son-in-law as he virtually saw him. Well-bred, well-mannered, and desirous of pleasing, it was small wonder

that Sir Frederick should pass as a paragon in the Curzon Street drawing-room. His aunt and uncle of course knew of his London crash ; they knew, moreover, that he had passed a vagrant and Bohemian sort of existence in all those years of exile ; but of the real truth of his past career they were utterly ignorant, or they would never have consented, much less urged, such a match on Maude.

It was the old story—a good many rejected suitors owe their final happiness to that persistent urging of their claims which always lies in the power of the lady's near relations. Then, again, Arthur was vehement in his appeals to his sister to save him from the consequences of his reckless extravagance. In vain did she indignantly represent that she could scarcely be expected to rescue him from his embarrassments, at what she considered the price of her life's happiness. He argued as our friends and relations so constantly do, that they are better judges of what constitutes our happiness than ourselves, returning to the charge with all the pertinacity that might be expected from a man in desperate circumstances. It was in his nature to shrink from the disagreeables of life, and he deemed it far less unpleasant to worry his sister into marrying her cousin than to face that dire quarter of an hour with his father, which his circumstances would compel in the event of her declining. Gradually the girl's indignant refusal waxed weaker and weaker. She was worn out by the way in which this luckless love-suit was so continually urged upon her. She and Ethel had drifted far apart, and it was difficult to believe what close friends they had been only a few weeks back ; still, she not only was a constant witness of John Hainton's continued devotion to Miss Clothele, but everywhere she went, heard their engagement spoken of as a settled thing. At times she thought of throwing herself upon her cousin's generosity ; yet, upon consideration, this was not so feasible. She could not urge that her family were worrying her life out on his behalf, while he on his part had afforded her not the slightest pretext for speaking to him on the subject. He had adhered rigidly to their compact, never overstepping the limits assigned to him by a hair's breadth. She saw now the awkwardness of the situation into which she had been

entrapped. To speak to him in this wise would be tantamount to saying "no" before she was asked to say "yes." She could not re-open the subject unless he gave her the opportunity; but one conviction was fast growing upon her, that if they did not leave town very speedily her consent would be wrung from her for very weariness. She replied one afternoon to one of Arthur's passionate appeals, "Would you be very much obliged to me, if I did this thing for you, and accepted Frederick?"

"Of course I should, have I not told you over and over again that you only can save me? I know you think that I have got nothing to do but present my father with a list of my debts, be blown up for a quarter of an hour, then to have them satisfactorily settled and all will be forgiven; but girls cannot understand these things, and I tell you it would be by no means such a summer shower as that I should have to undergo."

"And if you thought this marriage might—I won't go so far as to say will—make me unhappy for life, would you still urge me to consent to it?"

"Nonsense! How could it make you unhappy for life? Fred is a very good fellow, with quite sufficient income to give you everything a reasonable woman could require. You will save me, delight all your family, and make him—and I will confidently add yourself—happy."

Locked in her own room, Maude paced up and down for more than an hour, turning the whole thing over in her mind. True, she did not love Frederick—but what was that? Love, as far as she was concerned, was over. She should never love again. A common conclusion on the first disappointment of this nature. Her cousin was an agreeable, gentlemanly man enough; all her people wished it; it will rescue Arthur from his scrape; and, after all, if she did not love her cousin, had she not just told herself that love could never now have anything to do with marriage as far as she was concerned; people she knew got on very well together whose union had been a matter of arrangement and not of sentiment. She remembered to have heard Lord Lithfield say, upon one occasion, "What a man really wants to go through the world with is a sensible, amiable companion, and not a sweetheart. Love is a

selfish and tempestuous passion ; it is like champagne—we delight in it in our youth, but eschew it as we grow older.” She and Ethel had rated him sharply for his cynicism, for what they deemed his infidel description of the most sacred of the passions in the eyes of woman. But what if he were right—if it is only in quite our youthful days that we are capable of really falling in love ? And the result of all this battling with herself was that Maude told her mother that night, with a rather sickly smile, that if Sir Frederick still wished it, it should be as he willed.

Of course no time was lost in informing Sir Frederick that his wooing had come to a happy conclusion, and that he had now only to ask to receive a favourable reply. It need hardly be said that he took the earliest opportunity of asking Maude herself whether he might hope. The girl was fain to confess that he did it with great tact and delicacy. He said he should not have considered himself entitled to address her again on the subject if it had not been that her brother had ventured to assure him that there was hope for him, and that he did not presume to suppose that he could have won her love in so short a time. That was a prize for which he had yet to strive, but that if she could grant him friendship and esteem, it would be the endeavour of his life to win that love which she was as yet unable to give him, and Maude, laying her hand in his, promised that she would be a true and dutiful wife to him.

Mrs. Riversley lost no time in announcing the state of affairs to all her friends and acquaintances. Sir Frederick was in high spirits, and received the congratulations of his friends in a fashion all untinged with a dash of that sarcasm which was now so prominent a trait in his character. It was settled that the marriage should take place in the early autumn at Clumford, and, with one exception, all those concerned seemed well satisfied that things bid fair to be brought to a happy conclusion. The exception was Solano, but he naturally kept his displeasure to himself, and contented himself with redoubling his efforts to discover Marion Gardiner. He was sitting one morning after breakfast in Sir Frederick’s sanctum talking over some matters of business with him, when a servant entered

the room, and informed the baronet that a lady wished to see him.

"A lady wish to see me!" exclaimed the baronet, "nonsense. I can't see ladies at this hour of the morning: tell the lady I am not dressed, at the same time I am engaged on business with my solicitor."

Solano rose and looked out of the window. "Drives a deuced neat brougham, whoever she may be," he exclaimed. Solano could see the baronet's servant go to the window of the carriage. There was a short and apparently animated discussion for two or three minutes, and then the servant once more entered the room.

"Beg pardon, Sir Frederick, but the lady says she must see you for a few minutes. She says she will not detain you long, but that it is concerning a matter of the greatest importance."

"Did she give her name?" inquired the baronet.

"No, Sir Frederick."

"Ridiculous! go down again, Johnson, and tell her that it is impossible, and that I can see no one this morning, but that if she will leave her card, I will do myself the honour of calling upon her."

The servant disappeared, once more Solano from his post of vantage saw a consultation go on at the carriage window. Another few minutes, and the servant once more entered the room. Sir Frederick turned fiercely round and exclaimed irritably—

"Confound it, Johnson, if you don't know how to civilly make people understand that I am not to be seen——"

"I beg your pardon, Sir Frederick," interrupted Johnson hurriedly, and holding out a blank envelope, "but the lady desired me to give you this, and said that when you saw her name, she felt quite certain you would receive her."

Sir Frederick tore open the envelope. It contained nothing but a lady's visiting card. As he read it, the baronet turned white as a sheet, and ejaculated: "Good God! after all these years!"

On that visiting ticket was engraved—

"LADY RIVERSLEY,

"CLEVELAND LODGE,  
"MAIDA VALE."



## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### HUSBAND AND WIFE.

**M**ARION GARDINER turned up at last for a hundred," muttered Solano, as he viewed Sir Frederick's evident embarrassment; "I suppose," he continued aloud, "I had better clear out, the lady intends seeing you."

"Yes. I must see her; show her up, Johnson."

"I am going into the dining-room for a minute or two," said Solano, as he followed the servant, "so as to be out of her way as she comes in."

"You had better," said the baronet, as he rose to await the arrival of his visitor with no little anxiety.

A very few minutes and Johnson ushered a lady into the room—announce her he could not—as she had declined to give her name.

She merely bowed, but as soon as the servant had left the room she raised her veil, and extending her hand exclaimed, "Welcome home, Frederick, after all these years. I have only known a few days of your return and accession to fortune. I heard some time since of Mr. Latimer's will, but believed it interested a Mr. Riversley of whom I knew nothing."

The baronet shook hands rather coldly, and despite that he was evidently anxious about the result of the interview eyed her with no little curiosity. A tall, dark, handsome woman, who, though perhaps in the autumn of her days,



was yet enjoying a very brilliant autumn all the same ; a woman who retained her figure and upon whose face neither time nor care had left their marks. She might have passed for any age between five and thirty and forty, though in good truth she would never see the latter age again.

"You were wont to greet me more warmly in days gone by," said the lady, as she sank into her chair, "and know that you have the right to do so. The Continent seems to have instructed you in distant politeness."

"You see, Marion, things are very much changed since we parted."

"Yes," she replied, with a laugh, "it is a good many years to look back upon. Not only are things changed, but we, sad to say, also. We are not so young as we were, Fred. How do I look?"

"Upon my word," he replied, "time seems to have stood still with you. I congratulate you, I honestly do not think that you look any older than when I bade you good-bye that Sunday evening."

"That's very nice of you, although I am sorry to say I cannot return the compliment. You look older than you have any business to do. Do you know that I consider that you have been dreadfully remiss in not sooner discovering my whereabouts. Why! I hear you have been months in London! and also that you are a rich man. I never complained, remember, in the old days, and indeed helped you when the crash came, as far as my limited means allowed. Surely when your star became in the ascendant you ought to have sought me out and inquired whether I needed assistance. Indeed, as you are aware, I have a right to it."

"Of course I know that," he rejoined, nervously: "and I made and caused to be made numberless inquiries as to what had become of you, but it is not so easy to find any one in London, more especially when eight years have elapsed since they were last heard of."

"And whose fault was that?" she cried, vehemently; "did I not implore you to write to me? and though it might not have been much, you know I would always have sent you help to the extent of my means. I loved you

very dearly, Fred, and although men rarely read a woman aright in this respect, yet you had fair grounds to believe so."

"Why should I write to you?" he said, wearily. "What news could I send of myself in all those years that any friend of mine would care to hear? A life of shifts, tricks, and practices usually called by a harsher appellation, the result a precarious and by no means well-furnished table. Don't imagine I lived among the flesh-pots; a gambler's existence is a series of ups and downs, weeks of luxury alternate with fasting and tribulation. This varied with occasionally having abruptly to retreat from society because one felt there was considerable danger of being kicked out of it, not only sour the temper, but don't make one desirous of recalling one's self to the recollections of those who have known us in better times."

"Even I did not guess," she said, gently, "that it had been so bad with you as this. You have been in 'play' scrapes amongst other troubles."

Play scrapes a very correct definition of how the exposure of an ugly gambling transaction would present itself to Marion's mind; like all women, she could not see any particular disgrace in cheating at cards, and thought men absurd to attach so much consequence to it. Sir Frederick, for purposes of his own, was anxious to paint himself in the darkest of colours in her eyes. He rather wished that she should view him as a social "pariah," as a man that, although he had now inherited a baronetcy and money, had placed himself by his mal-practices outside society's pale, as one who, though once more in London, had utterly failed to regain his footing in that world in which he had formerly lived. Instead of this, as we know, he had resumed his old station, and by his present circumspect behaviour, effectually silenced such hazy rumours to his detriment as occasionally had been wafted across from the Continent.

"But these troubles are all things of the past now," she continued. "Of course, Fred, you will take your old place in life. You were a very popular man once, few more so, and if you were that without any money surely you can be so with. It is so much easier, you know, to be nice, when you have not to count the cost of it."

"Never mind me, Marion," he returned, "tell me something about yourself. Where are you living? Oh! I see," he continued, glancing at the card in his hand. "You don't look as if the sinews of war ran short with you, at all events."

"No," she rejoined, glancing with much complacency at her dress and the two or three heavy bracelets she wore, "I think this does credit both to my taste and to my *modiste*. I came into an unexpected addition to my former income about four years ago, so that, altogether, I am now very comfortable."

"Stop!" he exclaimed, sharply, and with a sudden alteration of manner. "A truce to all this fencing. What has brought you here?"

There was a glitter in Marion's eyes as she replied, with a light laugh. "My brougham brought me here, and for the Why? Is it so very curious that I should wish to welcome you back after your eight years' absence; more especially, Fred;" and here she dropped her voice and became apparently absorbed in the buttoning of her glove—"more especially when I hear that you are about to commit a great folly?"

"What do you mean?"

"First, let me tell you how I discovered you. I was at a little dinner party some three weeks back, where, amongst other gossip of the season, the marriage of Sir Frederick Riversley with his cousin, Miss Maude Riversley, formed a topic of conversation. That did not interest me very much at first, but what I subsequently heard did. One of the speakers happened to be very well informed on the subject. He is a friend of your cousin, Arthur Riversley. He related to us the whole story of George Latimer's will; told us how that it had been so long since you were heard of that most people believed you dead, and finally how for many months his friend, Arthur Riversley, had been regarded as the ultimate heir to the property. When I ventured to remark that, I thought the present Sir Frederick Riversley was not the Captain Riversley that had been in the 'Guards' in sixty-nine, and that the present man had been pointed out to me during the University Match, at 'Lord's,' a twelvemonth ago, he replied,

that was impossible, as the actual Sir Frederick had not then been discovered, nor had he arrived in England, and suggested that it was very probable Arthur Riversley had been pointed out to me by mistake. There had been much talk, he said, about this will, and he, Arthur, was at that time regarded by so many as the man to whom the property would eventually go, that nothing was more likely than such a blunder. Further inquiry convinced me that my informant was right. So you see, that it is but a few days ago I had any idea of your return to England. You understand now what folly it is that I am about to prevent your committing."

"Your appearance," he replied, "makes that impossible. I don't pretend to be particular, but I certainly shall not commit bigamy, for my own sake, if for nobody else's. I had no idea you were alive."

"But I see no reason that you could have to conclude I was not. Perhaps," she continued slowly, "you wish it were so."

He made no reply, but stood turning over in his own mind all the perplexities of the situation. His marriage, of course, with his cousin was now impossible, but at the same time it would not be pleasant to have to announce that he was compelled to break it off in consequence of having a wife already—a wife, too, whose antecedents, to say the least of it, were somewhat questionable. She watched him closely, but it was in vain that she sought for any sign of love or tenderness in his face. She had been telling nothing but the simple truth, when she said that he had been very dear to her in those by-gone days, and all the old feeling had welled up in her breast at the sight of the man over whose ruin she had shed such bitter tears long ago. She had stood, and loyally too, as women of her type often will, to the broken spendthrift, and, as she said, had even assisted him to the slight extent of her ability. True, she had heard of his projected marriage, but she would have been only too willing to believe that, after all search for herself had proved in vain, he had honestly believed in her death. Had he greeted her with a kiss, and even expressed honest pleasure at seeing her again, she would have been prepared to accept the dying-

down of the one romance of her life, and to have contented herself with friendship instead of love. But it was so evident that he was dead to all feeling, not only of friendship but even of gratitude for the past. It was but little that she had to give him in his extremity, but it was from her purse that the funds to enable him to fly England were actually forthcoming. She read in his face what he meditated. She had broken off his contemplated marriage, and she felt that he would never forgive her that. He was only thinking, she knew, upon what terms he could purchase their separation, and yet she could hardly bring herself to believe the bright, gay, good-humoured Fred Riversley she had once loved could treat her in that fashion.

"What is it that you have come here for?" he asked harshly at last. "You cannot suppose that it is possible to pick up the dropped stitches of our bygone *liaison* after all these years."

"I told you what my object was at first, although you don't seem to place much credit on my words, but that I should wish to see you again is surely intelligible; that it were best you should know this contemplated marriage an impossibility, you must admit. Do you not think that these were sufficient reasons for my calling upon you?"

"No doubt they were, but they are by no means the only ones. Whatever your intentions may have been, they must, of course, be modified by what I intend to do. I will not live with you and acknowledge you as Lady Riversley."

A short bitter laugh escaped her as she rejoined—

"I am Lady Riversley, and, whether you choose to acknowledge it or not, I can easily prove it."

"You misunderstand me," he said. "I should have said that I will not live with you as my wife. We must continue to occupy separate establishments as we do at present."

"That must be as you may decide; but remember this, Fred, Lady Riversley I intend to be, and by that title I insist upon being known."

He began to see that he was making a mistake—that, whatever concessions or terms it was possible for him to

extract from this woman, must be a matter of diplomatic arrangement. There could be no doubt but that she was his wife, and, as such, was perfectly in her own right in claiming both his name and sufficient maintenance. He had been very foolish. Soft words go so far with women that have once had a *tendresse* for you, and cost so little. He ought never to have entered into these details himself, but left such arrangements to the management of a solicitor or other practical friend. Stupid of him! He need not have received her as a lover, but he certainly ought to have done so as an old friend, and then he wondered whether it was too late to change his ground.

"Of course I have no intention of denying that you are my wife—it would be useless to do so even if I would—but we have lived so long apart that it would probably suit neither of us to come together again now."

She was not in the least deceived by his softened tone—it was too late for that. She knew very well that she could not insist upon his living with her, nor, it could hardly be supposed, did she feel any wish now that it should be so; but she was quite determined to claim her rights, and, from sheer womanly vexation, to drive a hard bargain with him.

"All that," she said at length, "are matters of detail best left to our men of business. You have my address, and I shall expect to hear from you in the course of a few days. For the present, I need no longer trespass upon your time, and will therefore bid you good morning."

So saying, she rose, made Sir Frederick a ceremonious bow, and swept out of the apartment.

As he touched the bell for the servant to open the door, the baronet was conscious of having had very much the worst of it—of having made a disagreeable situation infinitely worse by the extremely clumsy manner in which he had treated it. There was very little more to be done now than ascertain what his wife could be induced to receive as an allowance, and he was no whit inclined to make that allowance at all larger than was absolutely compulsory. And then Sir Frederick began to ponder upon whom he had best select to represent him on this occasion. His own family solicitor, he thought, was much too respec-

table a man to drive the hard bargain which he contemplated. A sharper practitioner would serve his turn better. He must talk to Solano about it. And then suddenly it flashed across him: Why not Solano? Why should he not act for him? By Jove! The very man to manage an ugly scrape. He would talk the thing over with him, and send him down to confer with Lady Riversley.

Could he but have seen into the street he might have drawn a similar conclusion upon other grounds, and thought, upon the whole, that it was as well to take into his confidence a gentleman who was already in such a fair way to arrive at all the facts of the case. Mr. Solano had done exactly as he had proposed doing—ensconced himself in the dining-room and exercised all his ingenuity to get a good look at Sir Frederick's mysterious visitor as she stepped out of her carriage, but she was too closely veiled to permit his catching sight of her face. His next manœuvre was prompt, and showed all the dexterity of the skilled detective. Hardly had the drawing-room door closed upon the fair visitor, than the street door closed upon Solano. To shoot rapidly some couple of hundred yards up the street and hail a passing hansom was the work of two minutes or so. Telling the driver to simply stay where he was and keep his eye fixed on the brougham in front of him, Solano stepped in, and, sitting well back in the cab, awaited the upshot of events. His project was very simple; it was merely to follow that brougham all day if need be, but, at all events, until he had tracked its occupant to what he should deem her home. As Lady Riversley stepped into her carriage, the cabman received his orders never to lose sight of it.

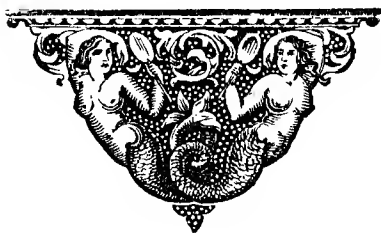
"What an awful sell!" exclaimed Solano, as the brougham turned down Stanhope Street. "I do believe she's going into the park. I never realised the absurdity of not allowing cabs to drive through there before;" but opposite Stanhope Gate, the carriage turned to the right up Park Lane, and Solano's mind was relieved. Indeed, he had altogether a very easy chase of it, for Lady Riversley drove straight home to lunch, and when two hours afterwards that gentleman dropped into St. James's Hall to partake of some light refreshment, he had ascer-

tained that Sir Frederick's visitor lived at Cleveland Lodge, Maida Vale, and was known as Mrs. Beecher ; for, although Lady Riversley had had her cards printed, and seriously contemplated assuming her proper name and title, there were some preliminary matters to arrange before she could well do so, obstacles, indeed, when she came seriously to reflect upon them, that might militate altogether against her changing her present appellation. The greater part of Lady Riversley's present income, in fact, had been left her by Thomas Beecher deceased, late of the Indian Civil Service. She had occupied a rather anomalous position in that gentleman's establishment. She had gone there to manage his household, as a lady housekeeper, some two years after Sir Frederick's disappearance. She always took the top of his table, and was treated with all due dignity and respect by the old gentleman ; but the position was, to say the least of it, rather equivocal. Mr. Beecher's friends were chiefly of the male sex, and it is certain that ladies rarely graced his entertainments ; in short, amongst Mr. Beecher's intimates, although they carefully respected the thin veil of propriety that it pleased him and his handsome housekeeper to throw over their relations, yet they for the most part regarded the lady as living under old Tom Beecher's protection. However that might be, it is easy to conceive that the *soi-disant* Mrs. Beecher might not care about that part of her career being too closely looked into.

Then, again, in her own neighbourhood, it would be difficult to explain the change of name. She was aware that her doings were closely watched, and that her antecedents had been keenly canvassed. It would be difficult to reconcile the two accounts—to make people understand how the relict of the late Tom Beecher could be also Lady Riversley. People of an inquiring mind might discover that she had been wife to both men, certainly for three years simultaneously ; so that, though Lady Riversley might carry matters with a high hand with Sir Frederick, yet she had by no means in reality such strong cards as he supposed. Still, she had not at present realised the force of all these objections herself, though she was undoubtedly not altogether blind to them. In the hands of



such a man as Solano, there would be a probability of her past life being ripped up should he find it at all his interest to do so. However, she is as yet unaware of that gentleman's existence, and a compromise between her and her husband has yet to be fought out.





## CHAPTER XXIX.

### THE STORY SPREADS APACE.

**T**HAT a shrewd, keen-witted man like Sir Frederick should think deeply over the tangle into which his youthful passions had brought him, may be easily conceived. One of the first things to be done, evidently, was to announce to his uncle and aunt the impossibility of his marriage with Maude. It was a bitter disappointment to him, this ; not, as I have before said, that he was passionately in love with his cousin, but that he had set his heart upon this marriage, and disappointment of our cherished hopes when they are near fruition is always dust and ashes in the mouth. It was not a pleasant piece of intelligence to break, and, as Sir Frederick mused over it, it struck him that the best channel for communicating with them would be through Arthur ; although he held himself no longer bound to extricate that young gentleman from his difficulties, he yet felt that he should have to do something for him, and he saw no reason why he should not receive service of some sort for such help. As there could be no doubt that this had to be done, the quicker it was done the better. It was only justice to his cousin that it should be so, nor could it any way militate against his own interests, a consideration he never overlooked. Yes, the news should be at once dispatched to Curzon Street.

It would be awkward—their engagement had been, he

was well aware, widely published. The rupture of it, and the cause of that rupture, would be still more widely canvassed. He pictured in his own mind paragraphs in the society papers. How the club smoking-rooms would chatter over the case! and the curiosity there would be about who this mysterious Lady Riversley was, where had she been all this time? or where on earth had he "picked her up?" and if, as he felt, all this was very unpleasant for himself, it would be still more so for his cousin: as far as he was concerned, he should arrange matters with his wife as quickly as possible, and then leave town for a little. If his aunt was a wise woman—and from what he had seen of her, he was strongly impressed with her worldly tact—she also would speedily depart. It was only hurrying her return to Clumbershire, after all, some two or three weeks, and by next year the whole affair would be forgotten. In pursuance of this policy he had at once dispatched a note to Arthur, couched in such urgent terms as would ensure his cousin's immediate attendance, and resolved to get that interview over before opening the affair to Solano.

Although Arthur Riversley was not in his own chambers, yet the servant found no difficulty in discovering his whereabouts, and Arthur was far too anxious about his own difficulties to hesitate one moment about doing the bidding of his cousin. On his arrival in Chesterfield Street, he was at once put in possession of the whole story, and, to do him justice, his first feeling was one of unmixed indignation on his sister's behalf. Still, Sir Frederick explained—

"You cannot suppose for one moment that I could wish to gratuitously insult Maude: you can't suppose either that I should be fool enough to commit bigamy, a discovery of which was almost inevitable, and the punishment for which would have been probably severe. No, Arthur," he continued, with a slight sneer, "it is eight years since I heard of the bride of my boyhood, and all inquiries concerning her having proved useless, the supposition that she was dead was not altogether unreasonable. I am grieved as you can possibly be about the whole business. You will say so, please, to your father and mother—that I re-

gret bitterly that I should have unwittingly placed Maude in such a situation, and that the discovery is a terrible disappointment to myself."

"You mean, then, that I am to tell them all this in Curzon Street?"

"Yes, and at once."

"But what am I to tell them about your present wife? They will want to know something about her—about who she is, etcetera."

"You will tell them nothing, my dear Arthur, for the best of all possible reasons—that you won't know. I have thought about that; all you will say is this, that, if my uncle wishes to see the registry of my marriage, he can. And now, as far as you yourself are concerned, I promised to set you straight with the world when I became your brother-in-law; as that can never be now, that agreement falls through. Still, I will help you in some degree, though not to the extent I should have done in that case. No, it's no use discussing the subject," he continued, as Arthur gave signs of suppressed eloquence; "you must comfort yourself with the reflection that the half loaf is better than none at all. And now, the quicker you go to Curzon Street and break all this to them the better. Tell them, although I do not consider myself to blame, it would be perhaps best that I should not visit any more for the present. Good-bye."

As Arthur walked across to his father's house, he felt as completely knocked over as when his sister first broke to him the news of Frederick's reappearance. He was fond and proud of Maude, and although for his own selfish ends he had done his best to bring about a marriage with a man for whom she avowedly did not care, yet he had always lulled his conscience to sleep on that point with the knowledge that the world generally would call it a good match; and, to do him justice, he was thinking more now of the indignity put upon her than the blow it was to his own pecuniary hopes. It would be talked about, of course, all over London. His mother, he knew, had flouted her daughter's forthcoming marriage in the faces of those of her compeers whose girls were still on promotion. How they would laugh over his sister's mishap! And then the

actual Lady Riversley, when she should come to the front, judging from Fred's reticence about her, was not likely to be a relation of whom the family could be proud. He would have hardly kept his friends in profound ignorance of such a lady unless he had felt somewhat ashamed of her. It was difficult to believe, too, that with due diligence Sir Frederick should not have discovered her being alive and in the flesh before; and the more he pondered over these things, the more a feeling of resentment grew up in his breast towards his cousin. In short, specious as the baronet's story was, Arthur guessed that he had not been told the exact truth. As regards this, he was not altogether wrong. Sir Frederick was certainly bound to have advertised and prosecuted a further search before taking unto himself another wife; but, on the other hand, although he did not know it, all such quest might have proved useless as was demonstrated by Solano's fruitless endeavours to find the missing Marion Gardiner until she chose to disclose herself. The difficulty of finding people who should have changed their habitual grooves of life in a labyrinth so vast as London is constantly experienced by those who, after some few years' residence abroad, would fain look up their friends on their return to the metropolis.

The consternation and wrath with which Mrs. Mortimer listened to her son's news was bewildering. She had no doubt whatever about the guilt of the offender, and saw at once with a woman's instinct the mock condolences to which she would be subjected. The good lady was painfully conscious that she had been crowing a good deal of late over her intimates, and knew her sex too well not to see the retribution that awaited her.

"Criminal carelessness!" cried Mrs. Riversley, "criminal carelessness on Frederick's part, that is what I call it, Arthur; and only we have the misfortune to be so nearly related to him, your father ought to prosecute him."

In vain did the rector mildly point out that if he wished it even, there was nothing about which Sir Frederick could be cited before the laws of his country.

"It may be as Arthur suggests, that he has not behaved well, and that he did not exercise sufficient inquiry as to the decease of his first wife, but even that is yet to be

proved, and in any case there is no more to be said about it. It will of course be a good deal talked of for a few days, and therefore the sooner we leave town the better. I must say, from my point of view, I think we shall find poor Fred the most to be pitied. A wife that was never heard of, turning up at the expiration of eight years, I should strongly doubt proving an unmixed blessing to any man."

The rector was not wont to allow the vicissitudes of life to disturb the evenness of his temper, unless they interfered considerably with his own personal comforts.

"Criminal carelessness I call it," exclaimed Mrs. Riversley, and the good lady seemed to derive much solace from this little bit of alliteration. It is something to have a high-sounding name, for either the world's sins against us or our maladies.

Sir Frederick was a man of decision, and he lost no time in intimating to Solano that he would be expected to dine in Chesterfield Street that night, and talk over important business afterwards. The meal brought to a satisfactory conclusion, the baronet quietly narrated the story of his marriage. In spite of his own discoveries, Solano was rather surprised to find that his patron was genuinely married.

"I thought," he remarked, "when that lady so pertinaciously insisted upon seeing you this morning, that we had come across Marion Gardiner at last. This is awkward, it of course knocks your contemplated marriage on the head; and now let me clearly understand what it is you want before you give me my instructions. It is quite possible that if I know that, I may do better for you than you anticipate."

"What I want," replied Sir Frederick, slowly, "is impossible. I should like to be released from the chain that binds me to Lady Riversley. I don't wish her any harm, I should have no objection even to make some pecuniary sacrifice if it could be brought about, but I most sincerely wish that I could be divorced from her."

"That may be possible, Of course I cannot say until I see how matters are, but I now clearly understand your wishes. The next thing is, what are my instructions?"

"You will simply see Lady Riversley to-morrow, and

arrange what maintenance I am to make her. I don't think you will succeed, but if you should be able to induce her to live under an assumed name, I should be disposed to deal more liberally with her in this respect."

"Good, that is terse and clear at all events. She is living, I presume, under your name at present?"

"I suppose so; at all events, she has got it on her card, and gives me as her address, Lady Riversley, Cleveland Lodge, Maida Vale."

This was a further revelation to Solano, although his face betrayed no sign of it. It may be remembered, that when he followed the baronet's mysterious visitor, to what he had ascertained before leaving the neighbourhood was her home, he had been told in answer to numerous inquiries which he had made at the post office and in divers other quarters round about, that a Mrs. Beecher was the tenant of Cleveland Lodge. It was plain to him, therefore, that she had not confided to Sir Frederick that she still was—and the probability was, had been for some time past—living under an assumed name.

"Now you must excuse me," he said, at length, "but if I have to do my best for you, I must ask you one or two questions."

"What do you want to know?" asked Sir Frederick; "go on."

"Who was Marion Gardiner when you married her, and how did it come about?"

"How it came about," returned the baronet, "is soon told. I was a young fool, and fancied myself in love. Being on the verge of ruin I, after the manner of all foolishness, must needs hamper myself with a wife. As to who Marion Gardiner was, I tell you fairly I don't know. I know what I thought her at the time I married her."

Solano looked keenly into the speaker's face as he paused for a moment in his explanation.

"I looked upon her as the widow of an officer in the navy, left but slenderly provided for, and educating herself for the stage, with a view of increasing her income."

"And are you still of that belief?"

"I can't say. I am not so credulous regarding women as I was in those days. I merely say now I don't know."

"Only one more question, and I have done. Did Lady Riversley give you any particulars of what her life has been during these past years?"

"None whatever."

"Now, you see," resumed Solano, "that a lady who rides in her own carriage, especially when it is so well an appointed brougham as hers, must be in tolerably easy circumstances. The question naturally arises, from whence does she obtain her income? If she has made it on the stage, it would be well known to theatrical people. If it has been left her, she can hardly refuse to inform you of the particulars. At all events, bearing in mind your *wishes*, I think it possible an inquiry into Lady Riversley's past life might probably lead to something, and would very likely put strong cards into your hand. Whether you use them or not will, of course, depend upon what they may be. I think you had better let me be the bearer of a note, asking for a statement of her income, and whence it is derived, before you can come to a decision as to what allowance you ought to make her."

"All right," replied the baronet, "you shall have it; and of course, if I deem it worth while, it would always be very easy to test the truth of her account. And now, as I think, there is no more to be said on the subject, until after you have been to Maida Vale, I shall stroll down to the 'Theatine.' You will, of course, come here to-morrow, and report progress. For the present, good-night!"







## CHAPTER XXX.

### JOHN HANTON'S GOOD FORTUNE.

**I**T was some few days before the story of the discovery by Sir Frederick of a wife long deemed dead leaked out. Before the whisper ran through the Clubs and the London world, the Rev. Mortimer and his family had taken their departure for Clumford. Secrets of this kind invariably do ooze out sooner or later, but in the present case there was no reason it should not have remained unknown for some time longer. It was in the possession of a very few, and those few were not likely to open their lips concerning it, but Mrs. Riversley could not refrain on the afternoon previous to their departure from expatiating in the strictest confidence to one of her bosom friends upon Sir Frederick's "criminal carelessness." It need scarcely be added that the affair was the property of the town before eight-and-forty hours were over ; and, as Sir Frederick anticipated, the papers had paragraphs concerning it, and speculation ran riot on the antecedents of the newly found Lady Riversley. Who she was ? exercised society greatly.

When the news had been broken to Maude, she had received it with a sigh of relief, and when her brother expressed much indignation at the way she had been treated, merely said,—

"Don't be angry on my accounts Arthur ; I don't believe Fred is so much to blame as you and mamma think him ;

but," she said, dropping her voice, so that only her brother could hear, "you won't forget, will you, Arthur, that I tried to do my best for you?"

He pressed her hand in reply; it was only now that he recognized how much she had shrunk from the proposed marriage. He had not seen before how entirely it was owing to the persuasion that he had brought to bear upon her, that her consent had been extorted. Whether it was indignation against his cousin, or the entire destruction of the scheme for his own redemption, it were hard to say; but the two together perhaps combined to make him more clear-sighted on the subject than he had been before. Be that as it may, during the few hours that his family remained in Town, he treated his sister with much greater tenderness than had been his wont.

Although most sincerely attached to her, Arthur had always regarded as both proper and natural that she should always sacrifice herself in the furtherance of his wishes or pursuits; and now, for the first time in his life, it occurred to him that he had gone rather too far in this direction. Stimulated by his anger against Sir Frederick, and swayed perhaps in part by the knowledge that his cousin would only partially assist him, he determined to make a clean breast of it to his father, and to seek no aid whatever from Sir Frederick. That gentleman was just now too much immersed in his own affairs to take much notice of Arthur's avoiding him; indeed, had he given it a thought, he would have considered it only natural under the circumstances.

In the course of due time, the news reached Miss Clothele's ears. Ethel, of course, shared the astonishment of the world. It was but a few days before she had called to congratulate her former friend, and wondered very much in her own mind as to whether Maude's wedding would bring her happiness. She almost paused in her self-imposed task—for a little even faltered in her scheme of vengeance. But that she was so thoroughly convinced of John Hainton's treason—so exceedingly angry that he should have dared to tamper with the affections of one so dear to her as Maude—she must have abandoned the part she was playing. She had resolutely determined to bring

this man to her feet simply that she might reject him with all the scorn she was mistress of. She had rehearsed this scene in her own mind many a time, and looked forward to it with a vengeful exultation, that those who best knew Ethel Clothele would have been loth to believe of her. It was difficult to believe that a proud girl, who had always shown herself singularly free from coquetry, could be actually exerting all her powers of fascination to induce a man to ask for her hand, for the sole pleasure of flouting a contemptuous refusal in his face.

She had completely estranged herself from Maude, and, though she knew that this must be the inevitable result of her conduct and felt the estrangement she had brought about very keenly, she resolved to endure it sooner than waver in her purpose.

There was one thing, of course, that none of the lookers-on could have guessed in this little comedy, viz., the perpetual influence of an Iago in petticoats. If ever Ethel faltered in her intention, Caroline Mangerston was at hand to fan the flame of her wrath, to dilate on the gratification Maude would experience, when she found how amply she had been avenged; to paint in glowing colours how penitent Miss Riversley would be, that she could ever have so misunderstood her friend.

"You will do us all good service, Ethel," said Caroline Mangerston, as they sat in the Prince's Gate drawing-room the morning after a ball at which John Hainton's devotion had been if possible more marked than usual. "It is good for us all that a man like Mr. Hainton should for once meet his deserts. The man who stops short of that one question which he leads one after the other of us to expect, and refrains from putting, because we are not well dowered, deserves punishment. He ought to take that into consideration before he commences his love-making."

"And you are still of opinion that is the reason why he so abruptly abandoned his suit to Maude?"

"Most certainly I am; why, what other reason could there be? And I tell you, moreover, Ethel, that if it were not for your money bags, far as he has gone, I should not hold it quite certain that you would have this oppor-

tunity of avenging our wrongs for which I so long. I would give much to be present at that scene."

"And I," rejoined Miss Clothele, "only wish you could. I almost hate myself for the mean and pitiful part I am acting; but I shall go through with it, and this man's humiliation shall be as great as it is possible for me to make it. If it could only be public it should be, but, in our prosaic days, men don't ask these questions openly."

It would awake much indignation in the breast of any woman, much more in an acknowledged beauty like Miss Clothele, to be made aware that the marked attentions of a favoured admirer were paid her only out of pique; that they were solely in consequence of a love affair having gone askew in another quarter; and yet upon the whole it is tolerably certain that Ethel would have been less angered, on her own account, than she was at what she considered the infamous treatment of her friend. She had regarded Maude's somewhat sudden acceptance of her cousin as due in great measure to wounded pride and a desire to testify to John Hainton, that pretenders to the hand he had not thought worth the asking for were not far to seek; but it never occurred to quick-witted Ethel that such might be the case with the man, and that Mr. Hainton, deeming himself thrown over in favour of Sir Frederick, was seeking to hide his disappointment by plunging madly into the flirtation to which she had challenged him. She could not guess the dexterity with which Caroline Mangerston had contrived to throw dust in the eyes of all the leading people concerned; how she, Maude, and John Hainton were just at present only so many puppets, of which the fair Caroline pulled the strings, and upon whose doubts, jealousies, and anger, she played as an artist might on the piccolo.

If it be urged that such slight offending as the forgetting of a dancing engagement could never have given rise to such inveterate malice as Miss Mangerston is displaying, it must be borne in mind that there are numbers of unfortunately sensitive folks mixing in society, who are continually making themselves miserable by imagining intentional rudeness is aimed at them, when nothing is further from the delinquent's thoughts. They are always

on the alert for slights, conceive themselves cut with design, when they are simply not seen ; they bristle with readiness to take affront, and spend their lives in calling their friends to account and in apologising afterwards for the error into which they have fallen. Caroline Mangerston was one of these unfortunates, always irritably alive to the fact that she occupied a dependent position. Careful as Ethel was that neither by herself nor her friends should Miss Mangerston be reminded of it, still people not thoroughly conversant with the ways of the house, did at times let Miss Clothele's companion see they regarded her as such—apt to be shortly struck off the heiress's visiting list such offenders.

Another thing, too, that must not be lost sight of, was Caroline Mangerston's jealous devotion to her mistress. She could not bear the idea of anybody sharing Ethel's affection and confidence but herself. It is, of course, absurd to suppose that Miss Clothele would not form other friendships, but these were always regarded by Caroline Mangerston with a jealous eye. She had upon more than one occasion, when she had deemed her influence threatened and about to be exceeded, done her utmost—and sometimes successfully—to occasion not exactly a rupture, but a diminution of the intimacy springing up between Miss Clothele and the intruder. But of all the friendships that Ethel ever formed none had ever aroused Miss Mangerston's suspicious vigilance in like manner to that shown for Maude Riversley. These two circumstances, taken in conjunction with what might be called the luck of the cards, had induced Caroline Mangerston to pursue her malevolent policy with the energy she did. She had first of all been offended, as only a woman of her unhappy disposition could be, by what she regarded as the affront put upon her by Hainton. Secondly, she had become wildly jealous of the rapidly growing intimacy between Maude and Ethel ; and lastly, when she began to brood over a scheme of vengeance which should also completely separate the two girls, the weapons seemed forged to her hand.

It is marvellous how we quarrel with our lot in this life ; how indifferent we are to the gifts fortune sends us—how careless we are of the golden fruit that seems ready

to drop into our mouths ; and how we hanker after the green gooseberries that are out of reach. Here was John Hainton, whom most people would have deemed one of the most fortunate men in London ; a man of good repute holding a good position, and in the enjoyment of a comfortable fortune, with nothing to do but to ask and to claim the handsomest heiress in London for his bride. And yet John Hainton is not satisfied with his prospects. He is willing to admit that Miss Clothele is charming ; although by no means a conceited man, not indeed imbued sufficiently with that "*il faut se faire valoir*" so invaluable in the affairs of the heart, still he did think that he could marry Miss Clothele if he chose. And here he sits over his breakfast this bright July morning ruefully pondering over the question whether he *must* marry Ethel Clothele—choose or not choose. He willingly admits all her charm of manner, her beauty, her fascination, and is of course well aware of her wealth ; he knows that he ought to consider himself the luckiest dog of the season ; but yet he feels there is a bonnie brown-eyed girl down in his "ain countree" who still holds his heart. It was only the night before he had heard the news about Sir Frederick, and now he is once more aware that Maude is free. He knows that the love which he has been striving these few past weeks to extinguish still exists in all its strength. He knows that his passion for Ethel is a sham, his love merest mockery. Well ! it is all over now. These thoughts have come all too late. He has gone too far with Miss Clothele. His attentions have been so marked that he cannot draw back. He *must* ask her to be his wife. And this is the man whom Ethel has devoted herself to punish on account of his lax sense of honour in this very respect.

Yes, he reflects, this has to be done, and must be done, too, in the course of the next few days. And now he ponders over the chance of failure as hopefully as others might have done of success. Could blunt Ralph Leslie have only known that any man could dare to hope for refusal from Miss Clothele, it may be questioned whether he would not only have pronounced that the puppy deserved to be thrown out of the nearest window, but would even have seen to the doing of it himself. Such presump-

tion would have stimulated even the Viscount's languid pulses, and his sarcastic tongue would have probably cut the offender like a whip. John Hainton would have found himself figuratively horsewhipped with as much necessity for seeking satisfaction both in his own eyes and those of the bye-standers as if he had gone through the process physically.

It was not that Hainton, in the event of his love affair with Miss Clothele terminating unfavourably, had any thought of rushing down to Clumbershire and renewing his addresses to Miss Riversley—quite the reverse. There were a good many things to be explained before anything of that sort could come about. He still did not forget that during his absence from the country she had accepted her cousin. He held that, far as matters had gone between himself and Maude, if she had cared about him she would have awaited his return; and therefore that even if he were disposed to condone this bit of faithlessness on her part, it by no means followed that she would listen favourably to him. John Hainton was hardly the man to expose himself to such a rebuff as that, but the one thing that he did recognize thoroughly was that he was desperately in earnest in his love for her. He might never marry her, and might in days to come very likely marry somebody else; but if there was one thing he was quite clear about, it was that he did not wish to marry anybody else now. And yet he held himself in honour bound to give one woman the chance at once. He whom London considered the most fortunate man of the season, was moodily thinking that marriage was a very serious undertaking.





## CHAPTER XXXI.

### A MUTUAL SURPRISE.

**S**OLANO drove off with his credentials in the highest possible spirits. The management of this business must turn out to his advantage. It must put Sir Frederick, he thought, to some extent in his power. It was impossible to say, until he had investigated Lady Riversley's life, what secrets might underlie such a connection as this. He had fully determined to inquire closely into Mrs. Beecher's past—to ascertain where she resided during all those years that her husband had been on the Continent; most especially was he determined to know from whence came her money. She might decline to tell her husband, and it was only too probable she would refuse to be questioned by himself on the subject, but to arrive at the true history of her inheritance Solano looked upon as a mere matter of time. At all events, he considered he was certain to derive pecuniary benefit from it in some shape, and then he wondered what sort of a woman he should find Lady Riversley. A determined woman, he fancied—one very competent to hold her own. It looked like it. She not only seemed thoroughly acquainted with her rights, but perfectly resolute about insisting on them. "Beecher," he thought to himself, why had she chosen that name? And then it occurred to him that it might be to his advantage if he could obtain some inkling of how Mrs. Beecher was looked upon by her neighbours.



Full of this idea, on arriving at his destination, he dismissed his cab and made his way to the post-office. The presiding genius thereof was a lady who had arrived at that age when her sex have a strong relish for compliment and gossip. A man like Solano understood such a woman as this at a glance, and was at no loss how to prosecute his inquiries. Opening the conversation with a request for a shilling's-worth of stamps, he went on to remark what a charming neighbourhood it was, how he had lately come home from abroad, was on the look out for a house, and had been recommended by some friends to see if he could not find something to suit him in this locality.

"I am quite struck with it, madam; you are quite out of the smoke here; there is quite a flavour of country about the place, with all the advantages of being within a quarter of an hour of Oxford Street. The drawback about it seems to be that there are no houses to let."

"Not many," returned the post-mistress, "but there are some. What sort of house may you be wanting?"

"Oh, I am not in search of anything very large. There is a house I passed just now—Cleveland Lodge, I think it was called—that would suit me very well, but unluckily it does not look as if it was to let."

"No, sir, that belongs to Mrs. Beecher, the handsome widow."

"Dear me! all you ladies down here seem troubled with that complaint."

"Complaint?"

"You are quite right; that is not the proper term for it. I am sure I don't complain, but when I no sooner begin talking to one handsome woman than she tells me of another, I begin to think that I have fallen on my feet and hit off an exceptionally favoured portion of the earth."

The post-mistress, who, although somewhat past her prime, still bore traces of having been a good-looking woman, bridled and simpered, as she replied—

"La, sir! If you have not taken unto yourself a wife already, there is a chance for you. For my part, I can't think what the men are about that they let Mrs. Beecher still remain a widow."

"Ah! it is quite evident," said Solano, glancing at the

third finger of her left hand, "that they are not generally so remiss in these parts."

"Oh, yes," replied the post-mistress, laughing, "I am disposed of, but Mrs. Beecher is a handsome lady and well-to-do; as I said before, I don't know what the men are about."

"I suppose she has lived some time in her present house?"

"She has been there about three years, keeps her carriage, and knows all the best people about. She called in here only a few days ago, to say that she expected a Lady Riversley to stay with her, and that letters directed 'Lady Riversley, Cleveland Lodge,' were to be left there, otherwise, of course, we should have fancied there was some mistake."

Ingenuous! thought Solano to himself, that is how she contrives to avoid all necessity of explaining to her husband that she is living under another name. "You don't know, I suppose," he said, carelessly, "where she came from?"

"No, I never heard, but I fancy it was only from some other part of London, because she has so many visitors who don't belong to just hereabouts."

"Did you ever hear who her late husband was? There was a Beecher I used to know years ago very well."

"He was something or other in India, I have heard, but I don't think any one ever heard rightly what he was."

"Ah, he was not married when I knew him, though it was out in those parts. Mrs. Beecher goes out a good deal, I dare say; visits a great deal not only in this neighbourhood but also in others."

"Oh yes, sir, she is in great request. General Hammer, Mr. and Mrs. Stukely, Mr. Shepstone the clergyman—everybody round here, that is, that is anybody, has called upon her."

"Ah! well, thank you; I must continue my house-hunting, and if I can only find something suitable, shall, it may be, take your advice, and try my luck with the handsome widow."

"I wish you success," said the post-mistress, laughing, "both with regard to the house and Mrs. Beecher." And then Solano, having extracted as much information as he

thought it possible to acquire, raised his hat and bade his fair informant good-bye.

Well, all I have learned, he mused, does not amount to much. It is quite evident that ever since she has resided at Cleveland Lodge, although passing under an assumed name, Lady Riversley has been living in most decorous fashion. The gist of the case, I fancy, lies in whether there was a Beecher, and if so, why she has taken his name. I have very little doubt, when I get at the facts about Beecher, I shall know where the lady's income comes from. Well, I have time to spare still. I don't suppose I shall gather any facts of importance, but it is well not to throw a chance away. Acting upon this resolve Solano gossiped a little at a neighbouring cab-stand, and dropped in with similar motives to two or three shops that were at no great distance, always ostensibly in pursuit of a house, and always anxious to ascertain if there was any chance of Cleveland Lodge becoming vacant. This, of course, naturally led to a discussion as to its present tenant, but further than a general opinion that she was "quite the lady," elicited no fresh information concerning Mrs. Beecher.

Now for it, he muttered, as a trim waiting-maid opened the door of the desired residence in response to his knock. Solano presented his card, as well as Sir Frederick's note, and desired the girl to ask if Lady Riversley could see him upon important business. "Say," he added, "that I will not detain her long."

The girl disappeared, returning in a few minutes with an intimation that Mrs. Beecher would see him, would he walk into the drawing-room.

As he entered Marion rose, bowed, and said, "I gather from Sir Frederick's note that you have come in the capacity of his man of business, Mr. Solano, to make some arrangements that have become necessary between us; pray sit down."

The post-mistress is right, he thought, she is a handsome woman. It is very curious that her voice reminds me of some one that I have known in bygone days. The room was partially darkened, owing to the outer blinds being closed to keep out the mid-day glare of the hot July

sun. The consequence was, that Solano, who had just come out of the sunshine, was a little blinded, and though he made out as he bowed that his hostess was a very striking woman, he did not at first see her quite distinctly. Whether by accident or design, too, Lady Riversley had seated herself with her back to the windows, and thus Solano failed to perceive how very attentively her ladyship was studying his countenance.

"May I ask," she said, after a pause, and speaking in a low tone, "if you are a professional man? In short, are you Sir Frederick's solicitor, or, at all events, a legal gentleman empowered to act as such?"

It is deuced odd, thought Solano, but I cannot get over the reminiscence of that voice. "No," he replied, "I am not Sir Frederick's solicitor. He thought, in the first instance, it were better that I, as one of his most intimate friends, should call and talk over matters with you. I am here to submit his wishes, and what he proposes to you, and also, of course, to listen to what your views may be."

"Mine are soon told," replied Marion. "I simply wish to be acknowledged as his wife, and that he should make me an allowance in suitable, not undue, proportion to his fortune. These are no hard demands, Mr. Solano, and nothing but what, as you know, the law would award me if left to its arbitration."

"And upon those terms," observed Solano, "you would allow Sir Frederick to go his own way?"

"Most certainly," she rejoined. "He cannot suppose that I would compel him to live with me, even if I could. Let him go his way and I will go mine and trouble him no further."

By this time Solano's eyes had become accustomed to the half-darkened room, and the more he heard of Marion's voice, and the more he saw of her features, the stronger grew the conviction upon him that he had met his hostess before.

"Sir Frederick, Lady Riversley, I feel sure will satisfy you on these points after a little discussion. His note has told you that I am accredited with full powers, or I should be diffident about hazarding the observation I am about to make. The law would, no doubt, see, if you appealed to

it, that your husband allowed you a sufficient income in proportion to his own ; but you must excuse my pointing out that it would also take into account your own private property. To put it roughly, if you are in the enjoyment of two thousand a year, and Sir Frederick of four, I doubt whether, under the circumstances of the case, the law would not consider you sufficiently provided for. But I trust everything will be settled amicably, without any such unwise appeal. Pray remember, Lady Riversley, it is always the lawyers that get the oysters on these occasions."

"I have no more wish to appeal to the tribunals than you could have," she interposed, with an impatient gesture. "I have no intention of being grasping in my demands. What does Sir Frederick propose?"

She is dawning upon me fast, mused Solano, a few minutes more and I shall be quite sure. I more than suspect she recognizes me already.

"That you should, in the first instance, inform him of the amount of your present income and whence it is derived."

"I shall do nothing of the kind," said Marion, sharply. "As far as he is concerned my home might be the work-house and my maintenance due to the parish. What has he to do with property that has been left to me? I shared my last few pounds with him once, he has surely no wish to plunder me now."

"Ha!" exclaimed Solano, with a derisive laugh. "Even if his wishes did lie in that direction, my dear, you don't suppose I should allow such confiscation of our property. You are a good actress, Marion, your coolness and the half-light might have beat me if it hadn't been for your voice—that gave me the first clue. That you recognized me almost from the first I feel as sure as I am that you would have been only too grateful if the recognition had not been mutual. You see," he continued, rising and thrusting his hands in his pockets, "I am master of the situation, Mrs. Somers; anxious and able, mind, to work for your maintenance as your lawful husband should, if he did not think it more desirable that you should maintain him without his being compelled to endure such drudgery; able to prosecute you for bigamy, my sweet Marion, if not

perhaps trigamy when I come to a knowledge of your relationship to the late lamented Beecher, from whom I conclude the wherewithal to keep this extremely comfortable cottage and that very neatly appointed brougham is derived."

Marion rose and confronted him. Even the artistic *soupeon* of rouge that tinged her cheeks failed to conceal the pallor that came over her, although her voice did not falter.

"Yes," she said, in measured tones, "I knew you from the first almost, and felt that the worst that could happen to me was accomplished. You don't suppose I was likely to forget the misery of the yoke you imposed upon me and the abject *rôle* you condemned me to play for so many years. I sicken when I look back upon the smiles and soft words that I lavished by your orders upon the dupes I cajoled into your net. I have been perhaps a bad woman since, in some ways—I am perhaps now, that you discover me trying to drive a hard bargain, when as an honest woman I should never have crossed his path again. But I did love Frederick dearly once, and could not resist the temptation of seeing him once more. Had he met me with kindness even, I might have proposed acting very differently towards him."

"Sentiment, by Heavens!" exclaimed Solano, in undisguised astonishment. "Upon my word, after all your experiences, I must congratulate you upon retaining so much freshness of feeling. But sentiment mixes badly with business. How fortunate you are that I am here to manage matters for you! Now that I know who you are, of course it is for you to make terms."

"And who is to prevent my avowing the whole truth to Sir Frederick?" exclaimed Marion, imperiously.

"Nobody; but if you choose to publish our conjugal ties to the world, I, of course, cannot commit such a grave scandal as not residing under the same roof with you."

"I would die sooner than that should be. Nothing could induce me ever to live with you again. I doubt even whether the law can compel me to do so."

"As your husband I have a right to share in your income and possessions; but don't be a fool, Marion. I

don't want to interfere with you in the least. You shall continue to reside here, see me very rarely, and go your own way, but, remember, I am pretty nearly as impecunious as when I left you twelve years ago. You will have to allow me what I consider a sufficiency."

"And so, after all these years," she exclaimed, bitterly "you have come back to prey upon the woman whose life you ruined. You had best be moderate in your demands, sir. Don't make the mistake of over-estimating my wealth, or you will compel me to throw myself on the mercy of the law; and you, I fancy, can have no desire that your past should be unfolded as, in that case, it might be."

"I don't suppose, for the matter of that," replied Solano, "that the story of our past lives would be deemed an edifying history by righteous and high-minded people. I don't come here without making a few inquiries concerning the mistress of Cleveland Lodge. You know me of old, and cannot doubt but that, when Fred Riversley put the arrangement of the affairs of his wife into my hands, I should ask a few pertinent questions concerning Lady Riversley and her doings in the neighbourhood. I find that, under the name of 'Beecher,' she has mixed freely in society. Under the name of Somers I think society will speedily drop her acquaintance."

He had her on the hip now. He had fathomed the one weakness of Marion's present life. *Intrigante*, an adventuress in her early days, she had succeeded, since Mr. Beecher's death had given her the means, in posing as a lady of good repute, and in obtaining some footing amongst respectable society, and to this Marion clung with the utmost tenacity. Enjoying life thoroughly, and mixing at times in circles that would rather have scandalised her immediate neighbours, she took infinite care not to compromise herself in the eyes of those who lived about her. She knew Solano was right, and that those houses, the *entrée* to which she most prized, would be at once closed against her if her past career was once known.

He saw that she hesitated, and continued—

"Don't be foolish. Suffer yourself to be guided by me, and you will not have a great deal to complain of. You shall make me the allowance I suggested, which shall not

come out of your own pocket. Eight hundred a year, from the look of the house, and taking into consideration that extremely neat brougham, is, I think, about what the possessor of all these luxuries could afford to give her husband."

"Eight hundred a year! You propose, then, to take a good two-thirds of my income?"

"You might remember that, in days gone by, I have cautioned you over and over again never to interrupt me when I was talking business. Be kind enough not to do so now. Listen. As our marriage concerns nobody but ourselves, we will keep it to ourselves. You are still Lady Riversley, and, as arbiter between you and your husband, I award you an allowance of eight hundred a year, the exact amount, you will observe, that I have awarded myself as compensation for giving up the charms of your society and my share of this very desirable residence. That is an arrangement which I am quite certain must meet with your approval."

Still she hesitated. She was not altogether bad. She was no grasping mercenary woman, wishing to wring as much as she possibly could from a man on whom she had acquired a hold. She had, as she said, honestly sought out Sir Frederick, in the first instance, in memory of that one love-dream of her life. She was too much a woman of the world to expect such a passion could be taken up from the point at which it had been interrupted long ago, and yet in the depths of her heart there lurked a faint hope that it might be so. But still, if Sir Frederick had but received her with cordiality and pleasure, he might have done pretty well what he liked as regarded any arrangements with her, but his utter indifference and almost want of courtesy stung her sharply. She had no idea whether Solano was alive or dead, and, in her resentment forgetting such a contingency as his reappearance, did what an angry woman well might—insisted on her rights strongly and determinedly. Still, now her wrath had had time to cool, and she was aware of Solano's—or, to use his real name, Somers'—existence, she had a strong idea that to do his bidding might result in the intervention of that law which they were both so anxious to avoid. She



most heartily wished that she had never disclosed herself, but had remained shrouded in her *incognita* as Mrs. Beecher.

The crafty scoundrel who was addressing her read her perplexity and hesitation in her face.

"You don't owe him much mercy," he said. "He troubled himself to make no inquiries after you until he got the idea of this marriage into his head. You were not, so far as I gather, received with open arms when you did call. Indeed, the precious object of your juvenile affections would, I think, have been infinitely better pleased if he had never heard of you again. Now, don't blink the fact. I am as needy a man as ever, and intend to share your prosperity. Take this allowance from Sir Frederick, hand it over to me, and I rest content. If not, I will get that amount, or as much of it as I can, out of yourself. Take your choice."

She felt she was completely in this man's power. She knew of yore his bold, hard, and unscrupulous disposition—that he would never stay his hand from compassion for herself or any other; that, in his own interest, he had never hesitated to sacrifice man or woman, friend or relation—that he would strip her of every shilling she possessed, and then again desert her without one shadow of compunction. She shivered at the thought of all the shifts, hardships, and annoyances of a life of poverty. She had grown used to ease, comfort, and moderate affluence, and, above all, she entertained a fear of this man, which even all these years of separation had not eradicated. There was no help for it. She must do his bidding.

"I consent," she said at last. "You are too strong for me. Manage matters as you will."

"Now you talk like a woman of business," said Solano. "I will explain to you in two minutes what you are to do. You will insist upon eight hundred a year being paid quarterly to your bankers. Further, that if your husband wishes you not to live under the name of Lady Riversley, you are content to drop the title; but, as he cannot expect you to make such sacrifices for nothing, it must be in consideration of an extra two hundred a year. I shall be the bearer of these your terms to Sir Frederick."

"You may make my terms harder than he will choose to submit to," she rejoined, in a low voice.

"I am best judge of that. There is only one thing more. I don't want to inquire too curiously into your present resources, but it is necessary that I should give Sir Frederick some account of whence they are derived."

"I superintended the establishment of the late Thomas Beecher for between the last three or four years of his life."

"Exactly," interrupted Solano, "and when he died he left you a thousand a year, and permission to assume his name. That will do very nicely. There, I will detain you no longer. You have nothing to do but to wait till you hear from me again. Congratulations upon your good looks!—and allow me to say how charmed I am to meet you again, and now good-bye," and, with a mocking smile, Mr. Solano took his departure.

"There was no other course for me," she murmured, wearily. "It was the one way left open, and even this, unless I greatly mistake, must end in my destruction. I know Solano's greedy, grasping nature too well. He will never rest satisfied with the sum he has named. He will insist on my continually applying for money in excess of the allowance. The result will be exposure and my ruin."





## CHAPTER XXXII.

### SOLANO'S PAST.

**A**LTHOUGH Mr. Prossiter did not number Sir Frederick Riversley among his clients, yet from the interest that had attached to his discovery, he had watched the baronet's further career with no little curiosity, and speedily ascertained that there was very little danger of George Latimer's estates being dissipated after the manner of the Bunnington property. He occasionally saw Lord Lithfield, who shrugged his shoulders whenever he alluded to his late ward: "Not improved by foreign travel a bit, Prossiter; passed his exile amongst a very shady lot, I suspect, and what his whim can be for keeping that audacious impostor, who tried to personate him, about his house, I can't conceive. I shouldn't wonder that that plausible scoundrel cost him dear some of these days. I hear, by the way, that he is about to marry his cousin, that pretty Miss Riversley."

Now it was only a few days following the above conversation with the Viscount, that it was hissed up the pipe to Mr. Prossiter, sitting in the middle of his legal web in Lincoln's Inn Fields, that a person of the name of Wilkinson would like to see him if he was disengaged.

"Wilkinson, Wilkinson," muttered Mr. Prossiter, "who on earth can Wilkinson be? It strikes me I ought to know, and yet—stop—I have it! That is the name of the detective into whose hands I placed the clearing up

of the two Captains Riversley, when he had to decide upon which was the real one. Yes, I will see him." In obedience to the lawyer's order duly whispered down the pipe, Mr. Wilkinson was ushered upstairs.

"I thought I would just call in, sir, as I happened to be passing this way, to ask if you knew anything about that chap Solano, as he calls himself. You recollect him as I ran to ground at Fusby's Hotel in Wells Street. Queer start that was. I never could get over Sir Frederick letting that chap off. I don't know what he's doing, but he has been in London ever since."

"Well, Wilkinson, I have never set eyes on him myself since that memorable morning, but what he does is no secret. I hear Sir Frederick employs him as his managing man."

"What, do you mean a sort of steward, sir, a man who collects the rents, and so on?"

"No, not exactly that, I fancy. I don't indeed know precisely what his functions are, but he is constantly in Sir Frederick's house in Chesterfield Street, and does a good many commissions of one sort or another for him."

"Do you suppose, sir, that Sir Frederick knows who he really is?"

"That I can't say. It is quite evident, when they met in this room, that they did not then meet for the first time; knew each other well, I should say. I suppose, by your asking the question, you have become acquainted with Mr. Solano's past."

"That's just it, Mr. Prossiter; by an odd fluke I have. I need scarcely say that a man in my profession don't often forget faces—wouldn't be much use in it, you see, if he did; but more especially are we unlikely to forget a man whom we have, what we call, 'reckoned up.' Now, of course, after I got your instructions that there was no more to be done in that case, I troubled my head no more about Solano, but, as I tell you, I occasionally came across him in the city and other places. I was lounging one day near the Exchange, and talking to old Sam Williams—he has retired now, but in his day was one of the greatest men we ever had in the 'force.' Well, this Solano happened to pass us, and I said, 'There, Sam,

that's a fellow whose tracks I was slipped on about a year ago, and why they didn't put him in limbo I can't make out. Sam Williams looked at him attentively, and as Solano happened to pause to speak to a man, he had a chance to get a real good stare at him. 'Ah, Wilkinson,' says he, 'and a pretty foxey one he is, too. If he knew you were on his trail, he would take all your catching.' 'Why,' said I, 'do you know him?' 'Well,' he said, 'though it must be a good thirteen years since I last saw him; that's Ned Somers, I'll bet my life. He was wanted a good deal about the time I speak of, but he contrived to get abroad just before we could lay hands on him. It was one of those years of what they call great financial enterprise, which means, as you know, the confidence trick on a big scale, and, as usual in those cases, a good many of the winners filled their pockets without paying any penalties for their malpractices.' 'And I suppose that Somers, like some others, went a little too far,' said I. 'Just so,' said Sam; 'he was up to his eyes in all the biggest swindles of that time, and had been engaged in several notorious gambling transactions besides.'"

"But," interrupted the lawyer, "I suppose he runs no risk of proceedings being taken against him now?"

"Oh no, sir, none whatever, and it looks to me as if he was trying on the same game again. Old Sam Williams told me a lot about him. He had a swell villa down Twickenham way, and lived on the best. There was a Mrs. Somers, too, a wonderfully handsome woman, and young men about town used to be asked down there, and initiated into the mysteries of loo, baccarat, and *écarté*. He did a bit at racing besides, and Mrs. Somers, in those days, always had her box at Ascot, Epsom, &c."

"Well," said Mr. Prossiter, laughing, "I shall take very good care to keep clear of Mr. Somers or Solano as far as I am concerned. From all I hear, Sir Frederick is tolerably able to take care of himself in all these matters, but I shall tell Lord Lithfield what you say, and he, I have no doubt, will let Sir Frederick know it; but my own impression is, that the baronet knows all about it at this moment."

"It's a rum go," said Mr. Wilkinson, as he picked up

his hat, "and I don't understand it. But, going by what old Sam Williams told me, if Sir Frederick don't find this here Somers just a little too good for him, my professional experience goes for nothing." With which monitory words, Mr. Wilkinson took his departure.

Some few days afterwards, Mr. Prossiter contrived to see Lord Lithfield. "Didn't you tell me the other day," he said, "that Sir Frederick Riversley is going to be married?"

"Not so much going to be, as is," rejoined the Viscount. "More married a good deal than he likes, from all accounts."

"I don't understand you," said the lawyer.

"Then the last bit of town gossip has not as yet reached your ears. Riversley was engaged to be married, but it has suddenly transpired that he accomplished that ceremony a good many years ago, and that the lady is yet alive, and with no intention of allowing Mahomedan practices on his part."

"You surprise me; it is a wonder that when we were making inquiries high and low about him that this fact never came to our knowledge. However, I suppose it took place after he had left England."

"That I can't tell you; we are all quite in the dark as to the particulars, and further than that the marriage took place some time back—know actually nothing about it. Who she was, when and where they were wedded, are questions discussed with the greatest animation in drawing-rooms and smoking-rooms."

"Now, I have got a question to put to you. You have lived a good deal for years past amongst racing men, and have been in the way of hearing of all play scandals in the London world. Did you ever hear the name of Edward Somers connected with the turf, or such transactions?"

"Certainly, I recollect a man of that name. I can't say I ever knew him, although the probabilities are that I have seen him; but to tell you the truth, Mrs. Somers impressed herself more upon my mind. She was a very pretty woman. I didn't know her in those days, but met her later on once or twice at Greenwich dinners. She was introduced to me as a Mrs. Beecher, and I was told

that Somers was dead, and that she had married again. She is living somewhere in London now, I fancy. At all events, I know I saw her one day at Lord's last year."

Mr. Prossiter had asked Lord Lithfield if he had ever known anything of Edward Somers with the intention of telling him that Somers and Solano were one, and advising that Sir Frederick should be informed that it was so; but Mr. Prossiter now changed his mind. He had been so interested by the case of the two Captains Riversley, that the temptation of unravelling a similar mystery was irresistible. It was very probable that nothing particular would come of his inquiries, but he thought that he would like to know as much as possible concerning Somers and his wife before announcing the discovery of Solano's identity. Then, again, it must be recollected that Mr. Prossiter had a taste for theatrical effect; he had on the last occasion devised quite a dramatic situation, and his mind ran even now as to how he should communicate his knowledge in some similar manner.

"I suppose," he said, at length, "it is some years since Somers disappeared?"

"Yes: what particular nefarious practice it was that led to his effacement I don't exactly recollect, but it must be something like twelve years since he disappeared from the racing world. I have no doubt my informant was correct, and that he is dead; or else that sort of fellow is as certain to reappear again in his wonted haunts as the swallows to come back with the summer—they vanish for a time, but it is only until the storm blows over."

"You never heard that Sir Frederick Riversley lost money to him, did you?"

"No—he was before Fred Riversley's time. I should not think he ever even knew him. To the best of my recollection, he disappeared about the time Fred joined the Guards."

"And you say that you did not know him yourself?" pursued Mr. Prossiter.

"No—only by hearsay; and even that owing in an indirect fashion to his wife. Seeing her constantly about, and admiring her greatly, one naturally inquired who she was, which of course included who and what was her

husband ; and there were plenty of gambling stories afloat about him. And now, I should like to know what is your object in putting me into the witness-box, and cross-examining me about a delinquent who is dead and gone."

"Never mind," laughed the lawyer, "we come across strange stories at times in our business, and I happened to hear only the other day a little about this man Somers. By the way, can you tell me if Mr. Hainton is in town?"

Lord Lithfield looked keenly at his interlocutor, and then said, dryly, "Yes, you are his solicitor, I presume?"

"Yes ; we have been for some years. Capital man of business he is, too. There is something I want to see him about before he leaves town."

"The draft of his marriage settlements, I imagine?"

"Not at all," returned Mr. Prossiter ; I had no idea there was any likelihood of our services being required in that way. We most certainly as yet have received no instructions. I want to see him about a very different matter. You may remember that he went abroad very suddenly last year, and was absent for a very considerable period."

"I think I do recollect something about it," replied the Viscount, "but I am not a Chumfordshire man. I know that he did not turn up in London till late in the season, and had just arrived, I think, from America."

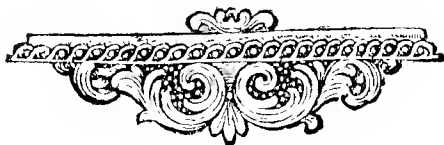
"That was so, the head clerk of Bramley and Co. levanted last autumn, carrying away with him a large amount of securities, the property of Mr. Hainton and other of their clients, and it was entirely owing to Mr. Hainton's promptitude and energy that nearly the whole of these have been recovered. As an old customer he of course knew this man by sight, and, accompanied by a police officer, started for New York by the very next boat ; but the defaulter was cunning, and they had a long and exciting chase over half the Northern States before they came up with him and compelled him to disgorge. Another client of ours, Miss Clothele, is considerably indebted to Mr. Hainton for his exertions."

Ah ! this, then, thought Lord Lithfield, accounts for it all. I see now how it is that Hainton got so much the best of us all. Gratitude for the money bags that he had wrested



from the spoiler gave him his opportunity, and he has made the most of it. What a fool I was that I could not make my mind up before he reappeared upon the scene! Now it is too late.


“Well, good-bye,” continued Mr. Prossiter. “It may be that I shall have a story to tell you in connection with that man Somers which will a little astonish you, but until I have made further inquiries it is hard to say whether there is anything in it or not,” and so saying the lawyer bustled off.





## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### SMOKING-ROOM GOSSIP.

ERY well satisfied was Mr. Solano as he returned from his morning's work at Maida Vale. He saw himself at last with a prospect of obtaining that hold over Sir Frederick he so ardently desired. They might once more change places. It had been his lot in the first place to give orders, and afterwards to obey them. It was likely, he thought, that it might be his turn to give orders again. That Sir Frederick should deem himself really married could be made of course a profitable source of income to himself, but at the same time the *exposé* had been made, and therefore there was neither hush-money nor the coercion which the possession of a secret involved to be got out of it. Still, his was one of those sanguine and fertile minds which invariably picture to themselves great results from every turn of fortune in their favour. At all events there was a substantial and comfortable income assured to him as long as Marion lived. He recollected the old ascendancy that he had possessed over her, and felt there was little chance of her rebelling against his commands.

As for Sir Frederick, he was by no means well pleased at the terms which his emissary had arranged. He protested at the amount of income agreed upon, was extremely inquisitive as to what Lady Riversley's present resources might be, and whence they were derived. Solano's story

in reply was fluent and unfaltering. He told it as it had been arranged he should, how she had managed the household of Mr. Beecher for some three years or so, and how (and here, to add to the plausibility of his tale, he indulged in a little embroidery) her elderly master became so enamoured of his fair housekeeper, that he was anxious to make her his wife. That, as none knew better than Sir Frederick, being impossible, he did the next best thing he could, died, and left her a good slice of his property, amounting to about a thousand a year. Mr. Solano thought it prudent to rate the late Mr. Beecher's fortune as moderately as possible.

"If she is as well off as that," exclaimed Sir Frederick, "I don't see the slightest necessity for my making any allowance whatever. I very much doubt if I can be legally compelled to do so."

"You must remember," rejoined Solano, "that you are separated from her on no other grounds than your own whim or wish. She is perfectly willing to live with you, and you can assign no reason for refusing her the place she is entitled to claim in your house; you can allege nothing whatever against her to warrant you in refusing her both your name and protection. How the lawyers might decide I don't know, but the verdict of the world would unquestionably be that you were bound to maintain her decently, and not, because she happened to have some small property of her own, leave her to maintain herself."

Sir Frederick was not very much afraid of the world's opinion, but he had been too long a social pariah not to value the reputation of respectability which he had acquired of late. Odd though it may sound, he had derived no little consolation from the fact that he had at all events saved a couple of thousand pounds. Arthur Riversley, in an indignant and rather high-flown letter, had informed him that he could not think of accepting pecuniary assistance from one who, he still held, had behaved with so little consideration to his sister, and consequently the baronet was completely released from any promise of that nature.

"It is a great deal too much," he growled at last, "but I suppose there is no way out of it. It is part of the bargain that she is to drop my name, remember."

"Perfectly understood," replied Solano. "I said emphatically, if you agreed to allow her so handsome an income as eight hundred, it must be upon your own terms. Her only stipulation is that she may live where she likes."

Another pure piece of invention on Solano's part, no sort of discussion, as we know, having taken place between him and Marion on this point, but it sounded more as if he had waged a tough battle in his patron's interests. It might be supposed that a shrewd and suspicious man, such as Sir Frederick now was, would on an occasion like this have some distrust of such a scoundrel as he knew Solano to be; but it was impossible for him to even guess at the truth. He had seen Marion. She had claimed him as her husband, and announced her intention of asserting her rights as his wife. It was in his eyes simply a question of price, and wincing sore at that she had determined on, he gave his assent.

In a cosy corner of the Theatine smoking-room are seated the three same men who, two years ago, were discussing George Latimer's will, and what had become of Fred Riversley. They were chatting now over the events of the wellnigh past season, for London was already beginning to fly to foreign parts and the salt waters.

"It's an odd thing," said Frank Blanford, "that Miss Clothele's engagement is not yet officially announced. There can be no doubt of its being 'a case.' That fellow, Hainton, has beat the lot of us. I never was more than quite an outsider myself, still I feel so bad about it, that I really must—yes!—just so, Colonel, I really must—have something to drink. Here, waiter, get me a gin-and-seltzer, with a big lump of ice in it."

"Yes, I should think it is so," remarked Ralph Leslie; "but what puzzles me is, where the deuce he did the first part of his love-making. Why, he was away in America till a few weeks ago, and yet, when they met in London, they met almost as avowed lovers. I used to think, for my part, that he was sweet upon Miss Riversley."

"I can explain that to you, Ralph," said Lord Lithfield, in his habitual languid tones. "I will tell you how Hainton slipped us all, and got so much the best of it."

It seems that a fraudulent cashier bolted with a lot of moneys, securities, and so on, belonging to Hainton and others. Hainton instantly started on his trail, stuck to him like a bloodhound over miles and miles, and for days and days, finally ran him down, and compelled him to disgorge. Now, amongst 'the others' whose property was thus recovered, was Miss Clothele's. Prossiter, from whom I had the story, tells me that Hainton saved her from a very considerable loss."

"I see, said Frank Blanford; "this, of course, led to letters and telegraph messages. The lady began by mixing up gratitude with business, and the gentleman took to lightening his replies with a dash of sentiment. Oh, I see it all now. He had the opportunity we all burned for in our first love affair. He, metaphorically speaking, had the opportunity of jumping into the river and saving 'the object' from drowning; and he did it. How was she to show her gratitude? He had risked his life to preserve hers. If the devotion of the life he had saved, &c. With the guerdon of that fair hand he would face ten thousand deaths. Bless you, my children! Tableau, and curtain! Dear me! here is a fine old crusted melodrama, such as our grandfathers delighted in, goes on under our noses, and we don't see it! Of course a woman would make a hero of a man who did her such service. It's an odd thing that detectives don't make better marriages."

"Stop your nonsense, Frank," said Leslie, "or we shall begin to think that gin-and-seltzer has got into your head. It's queer, but if you recollect, Lithfield, Miss Clothele and Miss Riversley were at one time inseparable, but of late we have rarely seen them together."

"I didn't think of it before, but now you mention it, I remember it has been so latterly. I wonder whether Hainton is the reason. He is a good-looking fellow, and it is just possible that they might both have had a fancy for him."

"Nonsense," said Ralph Leslie, in deep guttural tones; "I can't believe that two girls, whom I admire and respect so much as I do those, would be rivals for any man's hand."

He was still thoroughly loyal to his hopeless and unex-

pressed passion, and would have scorned to believe that Ethel Clothele could have so lowered herself as to wittingly attract an admirer from her friend.

Frank Blanford looked curiously at the speaker for a minute or two, and then said: "Miss Clothele's friendships are not wont to be long-lived."

"What do you mean?" asked Leslie, rather sharply.

"I have not one word to say in disparagement of Miss Clothele," replied Blanford, quickly; "but it is an undoubted fact that Miss Clothele changes her friends as women do their fashions—very rapidly. No, you needn't suppose that I arrived at what I am going to tell you out of my own head. A woman always knows a great deal more about another woman than we do, even if we are one of her intimates. It isn't so much that Miss Clothele changes her female friends, as that Miss Mangerston changes them for her."

"Miss Mangerston!" exclaimed Lithfield, "what on earth has put that into your noddle, Frank?"

"She is a wicked little devil, that Mangerston girl," rejoined Blanford, "and has succeeded in separating Miss Clothele from one or two intimate friends already; suppose she don't approve of any other 'private and confidentials' but herself."

Lord Lithfield looked at this young philosopher with admiration. Here was a young gentleman who had not been launched upon Town above some four or five years, quietly announcing a discovery which had utterly escaped him, the veteran of a score of seasons, and he had a shrewd suspicion that Frank was probably right to some extent in what he stated.

"How did you get at it, young 'un?" he asked, at last.

"Well, Mrs. Maddingham gave me the first hint; and if she don't know what's what, there's nobody about in petticoats that does."

"And you think," said Leslie, sternly, "that Miss Mangerston brought about an estrangement between these two!"

"I can't be certain, Colonel; I only speak according to my lights, and those of my mentor, but that is my impression."

Leslie relapsed into silence; he was puzzling in his own mind as to what object Miss Mangerston could possibly have in disturbing the intimacy of the two girls. As for Frank Blanford's theory of her being jealous of Miss Clothele's affections, he utterly scouted the idea. It was much more likely, he thought, that Miss Mangerston had nothing to do with it.

"Ah! you will turn out a nice young man," said Lithfield, "if Mrs. Maddingham has taken you in hand."

"I trust so," said Blanford, demurely. "I believe that she has educated a good many of us, and that her pupils can take care of themselves. Did she ever give you a lesson, Viscount?"

"Well, just a hint in my youth," returned Lithfield, laughing.

"There is something wrong about it," broke in Leslie, abruptly; "I cannot understand it. It is always a sad pity to see close friendships severed: and so often, if a third person would only intervene, things might be so readily put straight; a mediator can so easily soothe the pride of both, and it is probably nothing but that which leads to continued estrangement. I'll do it. I cannot see Miss Riversley, because she has left town; but I can and will see Miss Clothele, and talk it all over with her to-morrow."

"I say, good heavens, Colonel, you can't do that, you know. You'll get yourself into an awful mess for one thing, and me into no end of a scrape for another. You are not a relation, you know. You can't go talking to them, and telling them not to 'let their angry passions rise.'"

"Don't be alarmed. I'll take very good care to keep your name out of it. I don't imagine I shall come to any great harm on my own account."

"Oh, lord!" exclaimed Blanford, with a mock affectation of terror, "that only shows how very little you comprehend the Mangerstons. A forlorn hope is a light and comparatively trivial business compared to the task you have set yourself."

"My dear Ralph," exclaimed Lithfield, "you cannot induce ladies in London to dwell together in peace and

unity by rough and ready measures, such as you coeree your 'happy family' with on the north-west frontier. I really think you had better not interfere in this matter. How men get wrong with one another at times, it is difficult to understand; but how women get wrong with each other, God only knows! Mrs. Maddingham's promising pupil, here, will tell you that is quite beyond the masculine understanding."

"I can't see that I can possibly do any harm," replied Leslie. "I am not going to see the two nicest girls I ever met, and who were such fast friends, drift apart just because somebody won't take the trouble to inquire what's wrong between them."

"'He who will to Cupar, maun to Cupar,' as you Scotch say. Well, Colonel, you can't say you have not had warning. You have listened to the lips of experience. The only thing I regret," continued Blanford, "is that we have not had a farewell banquet. There ought to have been a solemn leave-taking of a comrade about to depart upon such desperate service."

"I have no doubt of your sincerity upon that latter point, Master Frank," replied Leslie, laughing in spite of himself. "I know your passion for getting up a dinner on all occasions, but I tell you what I'll do, I'll feast both of you here if my mission is successful."

"I wish it may be," said Lithfield, "for I quite agree with you, it's a pity those two should differ, and now I am off."

"Ah, Viscount, that's a dinner invitation fixed for the Greek Kalends," said Blanford, as the party rose. "I wish you luck, Colonel, but you are falling into a grievous error if you don't take Miss Mangerston into your calculations."







## CHAPTER XXXIV.

LESLIE CARRIES OUT HIS RESOLVE.

**R**ALPH LESLIE was not a man likely to hesitate when he had made up his mind that a thing was to be done. His was one of those frank, loyal natures which shrink from neither trouble nor unpleasantness to serve their friends, and, moreover, though the last man in the world to be a meddler, was not to be deterred from speaking out when he thought it sorely needed. He had a profound contempt for lookers-on who saw their friends making mistakes or floundering in difficulties, without either by word or deed endeavouring to assist them. He held it as part of his creed that it was a duty to come to the rescue of a comrade before his cry for help should reach your ears ; like the hero of the American poet when he conceived—

“He saw his duty a dead sure thing ;  
He went for it there and then,”

—and, true to his word, the next morning saw him on his way to Prince’s Gate.

“Charmed to see Colonel Leslie,” exclaimed Ethel, as she rose to welcome him, “although we have got to that stage in the season when I am afraid your visit is perhaps only to say good-bye.”

“Very nearly that,” he replied, “although I do not leave town for another fortnight,” and then he turned to shake hands with Miss Mangerston.

Now this was just the contingency which had puzzled Ralph Leslie all the way from his lodgings to Prince's Gate. It might be very easy to see Miss Clothele, but to see Miss Clothele alone, that was another thing. And yet it was essential that he should do so. He could not well say what he wanted before a third person. Interference in such a case is always a delicate matter, but doubly dangerous except *tête-à-tête*. How was he to get rid of the fair Caroline? Fortune so far favoured him, insomuch as her mother was not also present. He resolved at last to take the bull by the horns, and after some few further common-places, boldly asked Ethel if he could speak to her alone, as he had something of importance to say to her.

Although surprised, Ethel at once assented, and was then momentarily puzzled to arrange where their interview should take place. She did not like to turn Miss Mangerston out of the room; but that young lady at once settled the matter herself. Jumping to her feet, and casting upon the Colonel a malicious smile, she exclaimed, "Don't move, Ethel, I'll run away at once. I only wonder I am not asked to do so oftener," with which Parthian shot she left the apartment.

Miss Mangerston's remark had been made with the amiable intention of making Ralph Leslie uncomfortable if possible. He quite understood the insinuation. He knew that it was meant to imply that he was there to ask Ethel to marry him, but he was by no means so discomposed by the gibe as Miss Mangerston had hoped for. He had from the first accustomed himself to think that never could be; now that he regarded her as virtually engaged to John Hainton, she would know he could have no such foolish request to make. It was Ethel who opened the conversation.

"Well, Colonel Leslie, what is it I have been doing now? You are pretty well the only person who ever presumes to find fault with my proceedings. I don't say you are a very stern mentor, but you know you have lectured me at times."

"My lectures have been very slight and far between; but I really want to speak to you in earnest now. What is it that is wrong between you and Maude Riversley?"

"Nothing ; what can have put that into your head ? "

"Excuse me, but I do not think that I make any mistake when I say that, though no doubt you speak when you meet, you are no longer friends."

"Is this the result of your own observation, Colonel Leslie ? "

"Not only of mine, but also of others. A couple of months ago you were inseparable, and were so all last year as well, whenever Miss Riversley was in London."

"That is nothing," replied Miss Clothele, with a slight shrug of her shoulders. "Maude and I have not seen so much of each other, certainly, of late ; are not quite so intimate, perhaps, if you will ; people are wont to drift apart in the great whirlpool of society."

"And people are wont to talk about their doing so," rejoined Leslie, dryly.

"And who, pray, has dared to comment upon me in such a fashion ? "

"There are plenty of wild stories flying about, Miss Clothele, and as a staunch friend I hold it as well that you should know the estrangement between you and Miss Riversley has afforded food for much speculation ; I had hoped that it might have been some difference in which I could have mediated, but, as you insist upon it you are still friends, there is no more to be said. I presume I may congratulate you on your approaching marriage with Mr. Hainton."

"Do they say that of me ? " cried Ethel, quickly, and with eyes flashing with indignation. "Do they say it is I who have made mischief between Maude and Mr. Hainton ? "

"If they do not say that, they say what comes to pretty much the same thing. They say that you have stolen her lover."

"How dare you question me thus ? " and Ethel's little foot drummed passionately on the floor as she spoke. "Am I responsible because a man changes his mind ? " she continued, with a constrained laugh. "Men have done that before, I think. If Mr. Hainton ever had any serious intentions towards Maude, he apparently totally abandoned them. Do you consider I am called upon to reject a man

because he once admired an intimate friend of mine? I conceive that to be nobody's business but mine."

"No," replied Leslie, sadly, for it was stealing across him, although he would have been puzzled almost to say why, that no good could come of this marriage; it was Ethel's passionate, excited manner that aroused the suspicion in all probability. "It is to be accounted for in some measure," he continued. "I hear Mr. Hainton did you loyal service on the other side of the water."

"I do not understand you."

"I am told it was he who hunted down that scoundrel of a clerk who fled to America, carrying off a lot of valuable securities belonging to you. He was looking after his own gear also, no doubt; but still, I hear he saved a considerable amount of property to you."

"The first I ever heard of it," replied Ethel, with undisguised amazement. "I knew, of course, that a trusted employée of Messrs. Bramley and Co., my bankers, had absconded, and that I was likely to be a considerable sufferer by his defalcations. I knew further, that somebody went out on their behalf, and that the poor wretch was ultimately hunted down, and most of my property recovered; but I never knew who it was that they sent out—a police officer, I presumed—and I never had the faintest idea that Mr. Hainton had anything to do with it."

"Singular," observed Leslie; "the world presumes that it was gratitude for that service which first brought you together."

"It strikes me," said Miss Clothele, haughtily, "the world is taking most unwarrantable interest in my affairs," and then Ethel paused, as it flashed across her that this man, for whom she was preparing the greatest indignity that it was in her power to inflict, had so recently rendered her most important and valuable assistance. Ethel was not a whit purse-proud—the last girl in the world to endue herself in all the arrogance of wealth—but she had a very natural and legitimate pleasure in the enjoyment of all the comforts and luxuries that wealth confers. She, of course, had been made aware of the precise amount of her threatened losses, which Leslie vaguely described as considerable, and they were considerably heavier than the

world had ever suspected. They had not meant ruin, but they had meant the dividing of her income by two. The world—that is, her world—were aware of what she owed to this man, and actually looked upon it that the favour with which she distinguished him in so marked a manner was love born of gratitude. What would they say when, after all the encouragement she had publicly given him, it should be known that she had contemptuously rejected him, and it was essentially a part of her scheme of vengeance that his rejection should be widely published. Would she not be branded, not only in the estimation of her friends, but even in her own, an utterly heartless ingrate? She had for some time past despised herself for the pitiful part she was playing—a part so utterly foreign to her real nature. Nothing but Caroline Mangerston's ceaseless goading, by keeping alive her bitter indignation at the slight she conceived to have been put upon Maude Riversley, could have induced her to continue it. And, if Hainton's absence had been so misconstrued, was it not possible that he might have been misunderstood on other points besides? But no, she could not, she thought, be wrong on the one subject, namely, that he had quietly transferred his devotion from Maude to herself. She knew not what to do. She wished most sincerely that she had never entered on her present design, but it was not so easy now to draw back. She had given him too clear a right to speak, and that he would ask her to be his wife was only what she might expect at any time. Let her soften her refusal as she would, let her "no" be said ever so gently, and he would still have the right to say that she had won his heart to gratify her own vanity and caprice. What was she to do? Was it possible to prevent his speaking? Most women find little difficulty in preventing an admirer from coming to the point, but then it must be when they have not for weeks been giving him every encouragement to declare himself. Gratitude to Hainton for his services, indignation at his conduct towards Maude, mixed with a sense of shame at the unworthy position in which she had placed herself, were all mingled together in Ethel's breast. The difficulty of retracing her steps filled her with dismay, and suddenly, to Ralph Leslie's extreme

amazement, Miss Clothele burst into tears, and, pressing her handkerchief to her eyes, exclaimed, "I am very unhappy."

"For heaven's sake, Eth—, Miss Clothele, I mean," cried Leslie, who never in his life had been able to withstand a woman's tears.

"I have been mean, base, past all conception," continued Ethel, passionately. "I am thoroughly ashamed of my conduct for the last few weeks, and now I have got myself into a scrape from which I can see no escape; but you *will* help me, will you not?"

"You can hardly need assurance of that, but I must first understand how."

"Listen!" said Ethel, rising and pacing the room in her excitement. "They say I stole Maude's lover from her. I don't think I did that, but for weeks past I have done my best to lure Mr. Hainton to my feet. To gain that end, I have practised those petty coquetries that I have scorned in other women, and I have succeeded. I have won this man's love, and won it, mark, for the sole purpose of rejecting with disdain the marriage offer I intend he shall make me; and I have deliberately plotted to place this indignity upon a man who, I may confess to you, has saved me half my fortune. Now, Colonel Leslie, what do you think of me?"

"You were in ignorance of being under any obligation to him, remember; but put that upon one side, and it seems to me almost incredible that Ethel Clothele could have so treated any man. I know such conduct is possible to some women, but had any other lips than your own told me this, I would have said it was not possible to you. You must have been acting under some strange delusion."

"I acted under no delusion. I did what I have done to avenge, as far as it was in my power, the affront that I consider Mr. Hainton put upon Maude Riversley. He led her to expect that she would stand to him in exactly the position that I do at this minute, and then for no apparent reason he suddenly changed his mind. I have risked Maude's friendship—you are right, there is a coolness between us—for the sole purpose, when the opportunity came, of telling Mr. Hainton that women's hearts are not

meant to be played with as men list. To tell him that, as he chose to gratify his vanity and caprice with others, so have I chosen to do with him. To tell him that, like himself, I have been merely amusing myself. All this have I planned simply to avenge my friend. And now," said Ethel, sinking into a chair, "I am heartily ashamed of my own conduct, and want to undo all I have done. I want Mr. Hainton to know that I have been only acting a part. I want to spare him the mortification of asking, and myself the shame of answering, one question. I would wish him to know that I can never forget the great service he has rendered me, but also that I can never forget that he has behaved very badly to my dearest friend. You understand."

"Yes, I perfectly understand," replied Leslie, "but how on earth Hainton is to know all this, I confess I can't see."

"You must tell him," said Ethel, quickly.

"Impossible," returned Leslie; "anything I could to help you I would do with pleasure, but this I cannot do. I have no right to go to Hainton, and speak to him in any way on the matter. Remember, it is not pleasant for any man to be told he has been made a fool of, and that put in commonplace English is, after all, what you want Hainton to know. Nobody can say all this to him but yourself, and as you have done me the honour to take me into your confidence, forgive my saying that the sooner it is said the better."

"I cannot do it," exclaimed Ethel; "you must see I cannot. To say all this would be to refuse him before he has asked me to become his wife—a girl cannot put herself into such a position. He might tell me he had no intention of doing so."

"And even if he did, what would that matter to Ethel Clothele? But John Hainton is a gentleman, and though I hold you have treated him very badly, and have small claim for mercy at his hands, I don't think he will take any advantage such as that of you. You can't expect it to be a very pleasant interview. Making confession of our misdoings may be a healthy tonic, but is wont to be very bitter in the mouth. I don't quite understand it all, but it seems to me that there has been a regular game of cross-

purposes going on amongst us. Maude Riversley was to have married her cousin, and now it seems that he has a wife already. Don't you think that the reappearance of Sir Frederick might have had something to do with Hainton's sudden abandonment of his attentions to her?"

"I don't know, but I have a vague idea of Caroline's coupling Maude's name with her cousin's some time before their engagement was announced, and so little did I anticipate it, that I thought no more of it; besides, Caroline always declared that Mr. Hainton was the very incarnation of inconstancy, was always dangling after some woman or another, and was never very much in earnest about any of them."

"Upon my life," thought Leslie, "young Frank Blanford was right after all. Here Miss Mangerston's hand peeps out. It's very possible that all this little scheme of vengeance has been of her concocting," but, like all the *habitués* of the house at Prince's Gate, he knew too well how warmly Ethel resented any reflections against her confidante to hazard any unguarded remark. He merely observed,—

"I wonder where Miss Mangerston acquired her information?"

Miss Clothele made no reply, and Leslie rose, as he said,—

"I must leave you now, or else that young lady will be imagining that we are hatching the darkest of conspiracies. Only be your brave true-hearted self once again, and when I call to bid you good-bye before you leave town, you will have seen Hainton; everything will have been settled; and though the world may gossip about this marriage being off, I don't think you need care much about that. Good-bye!"







## CHAPTER XXXV.

### SOLANO DETERMINES TO CAPITALISE.

**M**R. PROSSITER, tapping his teeth with his glasses, as if seeking counsel from them, turns over in his mind what he shall do about Mrs. Somers. It would be as well, he thinks, to know where she is residing, and whether her husband is living with her. Necessary in the first instance to find Mrs. Somers, then, and he thinks that he had better invoke Mr. Wilkinson's assistance for that purpose. The detective, on hearing what is required of him, is as confident as Mr. Weller was upon a similar occasion, that he will find her if she is anywhere.

"It will take a few days, sir," he said, "but it won't be a difficult job. It's only carefully watching this Somers, whether he lives with her or not; depend upon it, he goes to see her sometimes."

But Mr. Wilkinson proved considerably out in his calculations. Solano had no intention of seeing Marion more than was absolutely necessary. Not so much because he had promised not to interfere with her, but he naturally wished to run no risk of the connection existing between them being discovered. He had not again set foot in Cleveland Lodge, and intended to confine his visits there to those absolutely necessary, for receiving the black mail he contemplated levying.

He had communicated Sir Frederick's acceptance of

their terms to Marion by letter, and a man who so habitually treads the dark by-ways of life as Solano does, usually posts his letters with his own hand. He had preyed systematically on society for so long a time, that all such precautions had become habitual to him. It is true he went about openly now, and no longer avoided, as he had upon his first arrival in London, the more public places, having convinced himself that nobody had any intention of taking proceedings against him for any of those financial robberies which had exploded in the past, but he was still always suspicious, and ever on his guard. Old Sam Williams had only told Mr. Wilkinson the truth, when he described him as perhaps the foxiest customer he ever had to deal with. The detective would have been, however, not in the least astonished had he known that Solano knew him by sight, and was perfectly aware that he was watched for some reason or other. He certainly did not know that Wilkinson belonged to the police, but he did know that his comings and goings were closely scrutinised by that person, though on whose account, and with what object, he of course could not tell. This naturally made him still more careful not to wend his way in the direction of Maida Vale, although he had received a note from Marion to say that the first quarter of Sir Frederick's allowance was there awaiting him.

Marion herself had been seriously disturbed of late. Only some few days after Solano's visit, she had been called upon by a somewhat dissipated-looking man, who intreated the favour of a small loan from her upon the grounds that he had been the first to call her attention to the reappearance of Frederick Riversley, and to inform her of the good fortune that had befallen him.

It may be remembered that Marion had received an anonymous note, which had led, upon the occasion of her going to "Lord's," to the Riversley who was to succeed to the fortune left by George Latimer, being pointed out to her. That unknown correspondent was the person who now stood before her. On that occasion she had been shown Arthur Riversley as the undoubted heir, and of course saw at once that he was not the Captain Riversley she had formerly known and married.

This man was a solicitor's clerk, and his employers had strenuously endeavoured to free Sir Frederick from his entanglements shortly before his final smash. This clerk had constantly been backwards and forwards to Riversley's then residence, and at that time he and Marion had been living together. Whether he knew they were married or not was little to the point, but there was one thing Marion remembered that this man also knew—that she had formerly been a Mrs. Somers. The story of George Latimer's will he had no doubt gathered at the time from the newspapers. That Sir Frederick had returned, and had recently discovered that the wife he had left behind him was still alive, was also amongst the gossip of the journals. But whether he had any suspicion that Somers might have been alive at that time she could not possibly conjecture. Probably not. There was nothing to lead him to make the slightest inquiry then concerning her past, but still, when you are drawing a considerable income upon the strength of a bigamous marriage, it is easy to suspect that danger of the discovery of the fraud must be ever at hand.

The truth was, Marion's nerves had been greatly shaken at finding herself once more in the hands of Somers. He had been a hard taskmaster, a bad husband to her in the days of old, ruling far more by fear than kindness, and she could not divest herself of the dread with which, during the latter part of their married life, he had inspired her. But for him she would have at once avowed her marriage to Sir Frederick. The more she thought of it, the more certain she became that, before very long, the imposition would be discovered and published to the world; though this man proffered his request in all humility, making no claim further than that he had been, he hoped, amongst the first, if not the first, to inform her of her husband's good fortune, she could not help suspecting that this was but the prelude to further demands, which would be accompanied by the threat of disclosing all he knew.

In good truth the man was simply one of those dissolute characters apt to live in a state of continual embarrassment. He was a shrewd enough man, and generally commanded fairly remunerative employment, but had lost more than one situation from his irregular habits. It may be

thought that he would at first have applied himself to Sir Frederick, more especially as his recollections of the young Guardsman were that he was free-handed with his money when he had any, and he had not overlooked such an opportunity. He had done so, and ascertained personally the great change that had been worked in the baronet's character by his impecunious and vagrant life abroad. Sir Frederick refused his request with cynical curtness. This had taken place upon Sir Frederick's return, now close upon a year ago. When he saw the fact of there being a Lady Riversley in the papers, he had jumped to the conclusion that this must be the lady he had known of old, and thought that she might, at all events, prove more favourable to his petition.

"At all events, as he said to one of his cronies, "I consider it worth calling on her to see if she would advance five or ten pounds."

Strange to say, he had never altogether lost sight of Marion since he had first seen her living with Captain Riversley. He had known of her as Mrs. Gardiner when she was keeping house for old Mr. Beecher. That gentleman employed the solicitors with whom at the time this man Tewson held the senior clerkship. He had, of course, at once recognized her as the Mrs. Somers who used to live with Captain Riversley. He had never regarded them as married at the time, and, when he saw this story of an unacknowledged wife, it was not unnatural that he should arrive at the conclusion that the lady living with Captain Riversley just before his flight was she. On Mr. Beecher's death Marion had continued to employ the same solicitors, and therefore it was very easy for Tewson, by a few inquiries from his old companion clerks, to ascertain that she had taken her master's name upon coming into his money, and was now residing at Cleveland Lodge, Maida Vale. That he should have known her as Mrs. Somers is also easily accounted for, as it was under that name that she was known when she first went to live with Captain Riversley. But this was the sum total of Tewson's knowledge. He knew nothing of Marion's past life as Mrs. Somers, and it never occurred to him to inquire as to whether there was or ever had been a Mr. Somers.

And yet, although this man not only did not know the story nor even suspect it in the faintest degree, he indirectly was the cause of the tragedy that ensued. Marion lent a more kindly ear to his request than Sir Frederick had done. She thanked him for his letter, and gave him a five-pound note, with intimation that he need not trouble himself to return it till times were prosperous with him and he was quite free from his troubles. With profuse expressions of thanks, Mr. Tewson took his departure; though when Marion had deemed this but the prelude to divers similar requests, she was in some measure right, for Mr. Tewson, as he walked away, chuckling pleasantly to himself, most decidedly made up his mind to see if more five-pound notes were not to be found at Cleveland Lodge on future occasions. But Marion was quite wrong in thinking that he had the slightest idea of claiming them as black mail. His intentions went no further than to wheedle the good-natured, comfortably-off lady out of such small sums as he could induce her to advance him by a piteous tale of undeserved difficulties—such as he had told that day.

Still, every day Marion became more apprehensive that her fraud must be discovered, and, when her past was dragged to light, what was to become of this thin veil of respectability, and this *entrée* into reputable society of which she was so proud? She would be thrust back into the life of the adventuress, from whence she had with such difficulty extricated herself. She would not, it is true, become poor, but still, even her property would be more or less at the mercy of her ruffianly husband. But, at all events, she thought, if she could save nothing else, she might save the shame of a public scandal. Full of this idea, she seized her pen and wrote to Solano a hurried account of her interview with Tewson, strongly urging her firm conviction that he, Tewson, knew all, pointing out the madness of the game they were playing, and the probability that, even before another quarter's allowance became due to her, Sir Frederick would have been informed of the truth.

“Even you yourself,” she went on, “what can you do in such a case? This man will probably be as extortionate

as yourself in regard to his share of the plunder. It is little likely that you will agree about your respective shares, and the consequence is that I remain at the mercy of whichever I fail to satisfy until the explosion comes."

The receipt of this letter, conjoined with the discovery that some one was taking so close an interest in where he went and apparently in what he did, made Mr. Solano cogitate deeply. It began to occur to him that the drawing of this pleasant little annuity, which he had settled upon himself, might not be unattended with risk, and at the same time, if Marion was right in her conjecture, circumstances did not go well for its continuance. Yes, he muttered, if this fellow Tewson really knows the truth, Marion is right, and the game is up. If, on the contrary, he has only an inkling of it, it is still getting too risky; but old gamblers like me don't throw down their hand just because the cards are running a little against them. No, it was a handful of trumps, and though they seem to be playing unluckily, there is a trick, I think, to be scored, although not quite, perhaps, the "vole." What does your shrewd man of business do promptly when an annuity looks like being paid shakily? he, if possible, capitalises it, and that is what my sweet Marion will have to do. Now, let me see, the only question of course is how much I think the noble baronet will bear. He has had a good year of it since he came home. He has landed more than one good "coup" on the Turf, and, thanks to Deblitz, has been in two or three goodish things in the city. It is something to know, when you want to sell, that you have a purchaser who can find the money to buy. He ought not to demur to ten thousand pounds. It is little more than twelve years' purchase, and it is absurd to suppose that in all human probability Marion's life will not run to over double that time. There is no fear but what he will see the pecuniary advantage of it fast enough, but he will undoubtedly wince under the idea of parting with so large a sum at once.

And yet to grant delay would be extremely dangerous. From the moderation of this man Tewson's first demand, I should argue that he is only partially in possession of the real state of the case; a strong presumption, perhaps, that

I was not dead when I so undoubtedly ought to have been, but he would find some trouble in proving that it was so. No, I must have money down, and sooner than not have it paid all at once, we must abate our demand. It is not asking enough, I know, but if we make the figure too stiff, Sir Frederick won't listen to it at all. This settles it. I want that money that Marion has got for me badly, for the baronet's beggarly allowance does not suffice to procure the luxuries that my soul delighteth in. And now, of course, I must see her about this capitalising business. As for that clumsy oaf who wastes his valuable time dogging my footsteps, if he is under the impression that I cannot lose him for twenty-four hours whenever I choose, he makes a sad mistake. There are plenty of places in London with two entrances, that seem to have been designed expressly for the purpose of baffling such inquisitors.





## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### ETHEL'S CONFESSION.

**A**FTER a short struggle with herself Ethel resolved to follow Leslie's advice. It was an awkward situation to place herself in, she knew, but after the service he had rendered her, she felt that her rejection of Hainton must be at least clothed in the gentlest terms. What became of her scheme of vengeance then? She must simply stand convicted in his eyes of mere idle coquetry. Ashamed of the part which she had been playing, and with her mission of retribution now rendered impossible, it took but little reflection on Ethel's part to make her resolve on cutting the entanglement she herself had brought about, in the straightforward manner Leslie had suggested. That Hainton would call the next day was pretty certain, as it was rarely a day passed without their receiving a visit from him; but in order to ensure the settling this matter to rights as soon as possible, she sent him a little note desiring him to be with her about one, as she wished to see him particularly. She thought the circumstance of its being a rather unusual hour at which to receive visitors, however intimate, might warn him that it was no little thing she had to say to him; and then by way of assuring a fair field for herself, she told Caroline Mangerston what she had done.

"That is a hint, Ethel, I suppose, for mamma and myself to make ourselves scarce soon after Mr. Hainton



makes his appearance. You intend to precipitate the climax, I presume? How devoutly I wish I could only be present to witness his punishment."

Miss Clothele, it is true, had not very many secrets from her friend, but she did not think it necessary to confide her present change of intentions to Miss Mangerston. She had misgivings that the light recently thrown upon part of Hainton's conduct, at all events, would not influence that young lady's opinions. That the fair Caroline disliked Hainton she was quite aware, though the reason of that dislike often puzzled her.

When John Hainton received that note he muttered to himself after reading it, "That's a settler. Well! it had to be done in the course of the next few days; it is as well got through to-morrow as later; I have gone too far to be able in honour to draw back. She has a right to have the option of taking or leaving me." When a man is deeply in love with one pretty girl, another will not quite supply her place, be she never so handsome; to slightly paraphrase the old song—

"If she be not *fair* to me,  
What care I how fair she be?"

—affection that is transferable at a moment's notice is never of much account. Hainton duly presented himself the next morning at Prince's Gate, and that Miss Mangerston did, after a few minutes, leave him *tête-à-tête* with Ethel had been too common of late to attract his attention. Ethel's face gave back no answer in response to a malicious smile of triumph that swept across that young lady's features as she withdrew.

"I have sent for you," said Miss Clothele, with a slightly nervous tremor in her voice, "to thank you for the very great services which I have only just learned that you have rendered me. Till yesterday I was in perfect ignorance of the truth, and looked upon it that the restitution of my property had been entirely brought about through the agency of the police."

"You make too much," he replied, "of a very small thing. I hope I should have done the same for you if I really had been acting in your interests only, but you for-

get that upon this occasion my pockets had been picked as well as yours. When the hue and cry is up, it is immaterial which of the victims collars the thief."

"You shall not cheat me of my gratitude in that fashion," replied Ethel.

But before she could go further, John Hainton interposed. He had all an Englishman's horror of being overwhelmed with thanks; he had to ask this girl to marry him, and he was resolved to do his duty handsomely.

"I would wish," he said, quickly, "that this knowledge had come to you later on. I never intended to mention it. I could not bear to think that, in answering a question that you must have known for some time I should shortly put to you, your decision might be influenced by the thought that you were paying a debt of gratitude; I would not——"

"Stop one moment, Mr. Hainton," cried Ethel, vehemently. "Forgive me if I think that I understand the quittance of my debt to you far better than yourself. No," she continued, rapidly, seeing that he was once more about to speak, "listen to me. I have asked you to come here in order to confess that I have behaved shamefully to you, to hear me plead guilty to having made use of every art that the most practised coquette could command to enslave you as an admirer. I admit having gone so far in the gratification of my whim and caprice as to entitle you to believe that I would be your wife if you chose to ask me; and own, with the deepest regret, that it has all been a mere sham. That I have affected what I did not feel, and have striven to induce you to believe that which I do not intend by every means in my power; and now, believe me, the greatest kindness I can do you, at whatever cost to myself, will be to save you from the mortification of thinking you could ask such a mean, vain, heartless girl for her hand."

To say that John Hainton was taken aback would be a mild way of putting it. That it was possible he might have been rejected he knew, and though he certainly did not expect such a thing, it would have been no matter of amazement had it happened; but that Miss Clothele should have been acting in a manner so utterly foreign to

herself—and John Hainton flattered himself that he knew her disposition tolerably well—was utterly beyond his comprehension. And what could have been her object? How little satisfaction she was deriving from the results of her mystification was attested by the flushed face and quivering lips with which she had made her confession.

He was silent for a minute or two, and at length said, slowly, "I cannot believe you. There is some unknown reason; you are doing yourself a great injustice. Ethel Clothele could not be so mean and pitiful a trickster."

He was not going to spare her, then. Ralph Leslie had misjudged him. She had undergone all the bitterness of confession, and now she was to hear what the man she had thus treated thought of her. They had changed places; she had meant to have poured forth her scorn upon him, while, on the contrary, she had to bear his. And it stung her to the soul to think that Hainton, like Ralph Leslie, held her in such high esteem that he would not believe she could have stooped to do this thing.

"I tell you it is true," she replied, in low tones.

"If it is indeed true," he said, "then you must admit you owe me some reparation. Will you tell me why you desired to inflict on a man, who is unconscious of having ever offended you, so bitter a disappointment? What object could you have in using such strenuous endeavours to make me miserable?"

"I cannot tell you. I can but say that I most sincerely repent of having so sinned against you."

"Then, Miss Clothele," he said, resolutely, "I will put it in another way. I must insist upon knowing who is my calumniator. What lies have been told you to induce you to try so cruel an experiment?"

"Lies!" she exclaimed; "no, do not think worse of me than I deserve. It was what I saw with my own eyes that induced me to act as I have done. I did it deliberately to punish you for the great wrong that you have wrought upon one very dear to me. It was an unworthy revenge to take, perhaps; and you must also bear in mind that I was in total ignorance of the great service that you have rendered me."

"Wrong that I have wrought upon a friend of yours!" said Hainton, with a puzzled expression.

But this was more than Ethel could bear. The expiation of her offence she had borne patiently, by being called indirectly a "mean pitiful trickster." He was entitled, she held, to deal out some punishment, if he had not generosity enough to spare her. But that, when she had pleaded what she had, in her own justification, he should affect perfect innocence, and presume to be entirely ignorant of the offence which had roused her indignation, was more than she could endure.

"I suppose," she cried, vehemently, recurring back to the rôle she had originally intended to play, in a manner that would have delighted Miss Mangerston, "you think it nothing to win a girl's heart, to lead her to expect that you were about to ask her to become your wife, and when, after an absence of some months, you meet her again, to greet her as if she was a casual acquaintance, with whom you parted a week or two ago. And then, when we retaliate, you call us jilts, heartless coquettes, and can scarcely express yourselves strongly enough upon our conduct. You know, Mr. Hainton, that you have done this. I have heard, indeed, done so more than once. I intended to make use of such beauty as God has given to me to put you for once in a similar situation; to tell you what I am telling you now, only with this difference, that I should have taken care that it was in reply to an express offer of marriage, and not as things stand between us now."

"You must, of course, be alluding to Maude Riversley; and, upon my word, in that case, I really should have thought that it is I who was the victim of ill-treatment. I most certainly, before I left England, had paid Miss Riversley most serious attentions, and honestly hoped to make her my wife. I was called suddenly away, as you know, and the first thing I hear on my return is that she is engaged to marry her cousin, Sir Frederick."

"But," said Ethel, "you had been in England but a few hours when I asked you to my dance on purpose that you might meet Maude. Knowing what friends we were, you might easily guess that if she were in town she would have been present at it. You were particularly told it was an 'early' affair, and yet you came when it was more than half over. There was but little display of a lover's devotion in that, I should imagine"

"My card said twelve," rejoined Hainton, "and I can only say that I arrived within half an hour of that time; the card, I have no doubt, is still stuck in the frame of the looking-glass at my rooms."

"I think you are mistaken on that point. It certainly should have been ten," and then Miss Clothcle remembered that it was Caroline Mangerston who had filled up and sent that card. "But still, when you did come, you hardly went near Maude, nor did you ask her to dance the whole evening."

John Hainton is experiencing some of the trifling inconveniences which will arise when a man has love passages in succession with two intimate friends.

"The first person I met on entering the room was Miss Mangerston, and she told me, as part of the news of the day, that Miss Riversley was engaged to her cousin. I had heard it already. But how could I suppose that Miss Mangerston could be mistaken on such a subject? I knew the intimacy that existed between you and Miss Riversley. There were no people in London whom I should have thought more likely to know the truth than yourselves. Like you, Miss Clothcle, I saw with my own eyes. I saw that Sir Frederick was in constant attendance on his cousin. I called the next morning on the Reverend Mortimer, but Miss Riversley had a bad headache, and was unable to see so old a neighbour as myself. Headaches and not-at-homes are tolerably equivalent in the London world. It was quite evident that, though Mr. and Mrs. Riversley were at home to me, their daughter was not; while Mrs. Riversley, although disavowing the engagement when I offered my congratulations, did it in such a manner as to give me to understand that it tacitly existed. Now, Miss Clothcle, judge between us. Who had most cause to complain of being badly treated?"

Ethel was silent, a light was beginning to break in upon her. Miss Mangerston had sent him that card. Miss Mangerston had informed him of Maude's engagement to her cousin, and Miss Mangerston bitterly disliked him. The idea began to dawn upon Ethel that Caroline Mangerston had no little to do with bringing about this game at cross-purposes in which they were all involved.

"You make out a good case, Mr. Hainton," she replied, gently; "an unanswerable case, in fact. There seem to have been terrible misunderstandings between us all. I cannot but think that we have been purposely led into them in some measure. Some person or persons, for purposes of their own, have thought fit to mystify us, and for my behaviour to you I must once more ask your pardon, and trust that you will so far forgive me as to allow us to remain good friends for the future."

"I am glad, at all events, that you believe my story without further question. If I had behaved as you had considered I had, I will own that I should deserve the punishment you intended to inflict, though I should hardly have thought you would have been so merciless an executioner. As for whoever told you that I have before been guilty of such conduct, I can only assert that if a woman, she has said so out of malice, and that if a man, he lies, and now good-bye. True friends I trust we shall still remain."





## CHAPTER XXXVII.

### SOLANO OUTWITTED.

**M**EN have committed murder for only a little loose silver. It is but a few months ago that a Spaniard expiated his crime in this country for sacrificing a whole family to a mixed lust of greed and cruelty. Shillings, of course, represent sovereigns to the world's pariahs, as the sleigh full of well-fed travellers represents food to the famishing wolves. Messrs. Bidwell and Austin, "grand criminals," who *went* for robbery, on the magnificent scale which so characterises this epoch, were near becoming millionnaires. As it was for the lightly using of other people's names, like the famous Doctor Dodd, they only

"Found some thousands odd,  
A prison, a cart, and a rope in it ;"

just escaping that latter on account of the milder laws of our milder times. The era of throttling has waned, and strangulation is no longer considered the best panacea for moral diseases, unless of the most aggravated nature.

Mr. Solano having once conceived the idea of capitalising his self-conferred annuity, brooded for some few days over this new view of his affairs. The more he thought of it, the more enamoured he became of his scheme. A capital of ten, eight, or seven thousand pounds was infinitely preferable to an annual income of very doubtful continu-

ance. No, he thought, give him only a few thousands to start with and he would set up for himself in the City. It was quite possible that Sir Frederick might never discover the fraud that had been played upon him. The baronet having once compromised and settled matters with his presumed wife for good, the discovery of the imposition would be of less value to him. If Tewson really was in possession of, or likely to penetrate the truth, he would, upon finding the final arrangement had been already come to between Marion and Sir Frederick, see at once that the information he could give was worth very much less than it would have been in the case of the baronet allowing his presumed wife an annual income. Even if he knew all, Solano thought the baronet could hardly prosecute Marion, and unless he did that how could he prosecute him—Solano. True to the instincts of his utterly selfish, worthless nature, he allowed no thought of his wife to influence his actions. He had come to the conclusion that this was the better and safer line of conduct to pursue for himself. As to how it might concern Marion he never even troubled himself to think. Notwithstanding his original intention of going abroad, Sir Frederick still lingered in town; but now that the season was about over, Solano knew there was likelihood of his patron betaking himself to other scenes at short notice. It was highly desirable, he thought, that this matter should be arranged at once, for that very reason. The ground was mined under their feet, and to occupy that position longer than absolutely necessary was, of course, not to be thought of. "I will go up and see Marion at once," he muttered to himself. "And now to hoodwink this fool who thinks he can dog my footsteps."

Mr. Solano was an undeniably clever rogue, but he fell into a mistake to which men of his class are prone. The overweening confidence he had in his own abilities was apt to make him underrate his adversary's capacity. Because he had discovered that he was under the espionage of Wilkinson, he had jumped to the conclusion that the detective was a mere clumsy tyro at his trade. Now, Wilkinson happened to be one of the smartest officers of the force. He had been, besides, forewarned that he had to



deal with a wily quarry, and acting on a hint from his friend, Sam Williams, Wilkinson, in the guise of something between a reduced tradesman and a butler out of place, allowed Solano first to discover that he was watched, and secondly, gave him time to get thoroughly accustomed to the personality of the individual watching him.

"Chaps like that Solano," quoth the ex-detective, "are always suspicious, and, if they have any object in concealing their visits to people or places, will be always jealously careful to see that there is nobody on their trail. If he deems that there is no object in concealing his connection with his wife, why, you will find her out at once; if you don't, let him find out that he is watched, and, when you know he has discovered you, *change your skin*. Accustomed to look for you in one shape, he will never dream of your turning up in another."

Solano had noticed the last day or two that his shadowy follower was not quite so persistent in his intentions. True, he was still followed, but not so continually as before. The deduction he drew was, that, whatever the object might have been for which he had been so strictly supervised, the promoters of that supervision had obtained no information that promised to pay them for the expense of it, that they consequently were relaxing in strictness, and that, in a little more, they would probably abandon it altogether. But Solano had arrived at a most erroneous conclusion. He had never been watched quite so closely as he was at present. He looked round for his accustomed attendant as he left his lodgings, and could see nothing of him, but Solano was much too old a hand to think, just because he did not at once see this man, that he was necessarily neglecting his allotted task. He knew he should very likely find him following his footsteps before he got very far from home. He loitered at more than one shop window to enable himself to have a good look behind him. He paused for a moment at the entrance of the "Criterion," and again convinced himself that the "reduced tradesman" was no longer honouring him with observance. He took no heed of the smart city gentleman, who, with a profusion of watch-chain and shiniest of hats, brushed past him and made for the American drinking bar.

Now the usual way to pass through the "Criterion" from the Piccadilly to the Jermyn Street side is past the buffet, through the side door on the right at the south end of the room, and so out at the grill-room entrance. But Solano, resolving to leave nothing to chance, had made it his business to discover another route, which, starting from the first floor, goes through several tortuous passages and, eventually descending past the lavatories, brings you out into Jermyn Street. This is used only by the *employés*, and never by the public unless conducted that way after the theatre for supper to the grill-room. Solano ran rapidly up the stairs, darted through a door to the left, and proceeded by this comparatively unknown road to the other side of the building. Now, as he ran up the steps, that smart city gentleman, emerging quickly from the American bar, followed him, but—through the passages—Wilkinson, for of course it was he, dared not come within sight of his man, as in these little used passages another person following him would have been certain to attract Solano's attention. He pursued him by the sound of his footsteps, but when he dashed out at the Jermyn Street entrance Wilkinson discovered that his man had vanished. The detective glanced right and left, but could catch no glimpse of Solano.

And now Wilkinson showed his qualifications for his profession. He did not even know which way Solano might have turned on leaving the building. To pick him up again in either the crowd of Regent Street or bustle of the Haymarket was hopeless. If he had utterly lost his man, there was an end of it, but remembering what old Williams had told him, he thought it was just possible that Solano would take a line which would never occur to any less astute practitioner. It was possible, he thought, that Solano might never have crossed the threshold of the grill-room entrance; at all events, it was his sole chance. If Solano had turned right or left or doubled back, then it was useless to hope to catch sight of him again to-day. Having come to this conclusion, Wilkinson hailed the nearest hansom, bade the man draw up close to the door, say that, if hailed, he was engaged by a gentleman inside, and await further orders. Solano, as he anticipated, shortly came

out into Jermyn Street, glanced round to see if the reduced tradesman was anywhere to be seen, took no notice of the rather overdressed gentleman who was studying the prints and pictures in the fine arts shop some twenty paces to the east side of the door, and was about to get into the detective's cab, when the driver explained to him, as directed, that he was engaged. This necessitated Solano's walking towards Regent Street in search of another, which was speedily found, and a minute or so more and Wilkinson is tracking Solano to Maida Vale in precisely the same fashion that he had followed his wife. As Solano pulled up at the door of Cleveland Lodge, the detective drove quietly by, making a note of the house as he did so. He drove a little further up the road, then got out and dismissed his cab. To prosecute a few inquiries in the neighbourhood pretty much in the same manner as Solano himself had done, was of course very easy, and he presented himself at Mr. Prossiter's office the next day with the intelligence that, as far as his observations had carried him, the only lady that Solano visited was a Mrs. Beecher, and that though, never having seen either Mrs. Beecher or Mrs. Somers himself, it was impossible he could identify them, yet he had very little doubt that they were one and the same woman.

Solano found Marion anxiously expecting him. "I have been wanting to see you for two or three days," she observed, motioning him to a chair. "There is your money; and now I tell you fairly I am afraid to go on with this personation. I have been recognized as Mrs. Somers more than once in the last few years, though I have passed under the name of Beecher, but of course the explanation was easy until you appeared. I had been left a widow and married again. But a man so well known about London as you were twelve years ago is still more certain to be recollected, and it cannot be long before Fred Riversley hears of the connection between us."

"Likely to be longer than you think," he replied; "at all events, I fancy it will be long enough to serve my turn. Riversley certainly would know that Mrs. Somers and Mrs. Beecher were one, but please to remember that he has no idea that Solano and Somers are the same persons. He

has never known me by any other name than I at present bear."

"That matters little," she said, wearily; "do not lull yourself with the idea that no one will arise to inform him that his confidential secretary, or whatever you call yourself, is Edward Somers, the gambler and speculator, who was ruined some years ago under very doubtful circumstances."

"Riversley would be very little astonished at the discovery of those two last amiable weaknesses in my character. He has known me pretty much in that way during all our acquaintance. The important facts he does *not* know about me, are my name, and that I have the honour to be your husband. But listen, Marion, I too have made up my mind that our little comedy is getting rather too dangerous to continue; but I do not mean to have such an unsatisfactory last act as you propose. I have come down to settle this with you as, for excellent reasons, it is desirable my visits here should be very rare. We must capitalise this eight hundred a year. You shall take, or rather I will for you, a lump sum down, ten thousand pounds if we can get it; if not, as much of it as we can persuade Riversley to part with."

"Absurd—that would lead to inquiry, and that to exposure. I live in dread that this man Tewson will call again."

"Ah! stop a moment," interrupted Solano, "tell me exactly what took place between you."

Marion then described minutely her interview with Tewson; Solano heard her story, and then questioned her somewhat closely concerning him. The man had evidently never hinted that he was demanding hush-money. He had apparently done no more than begged a small loan on the strength of having rendered Marion a slight service; Solano was too bold a villain to be easily scared. The appearance of this man Tewson, taken in conjunction with the surveillance exercised over himself, made him apprehensive that some one was secretly and silently working against him. With what object he could not tell, but to a man of Solano's antecedents there was a probability of their discovering awkward facts in his earlier career which he would prefer

should remain in oblivion. The sooner his scheme of capitalisation was carried out the better, as it was quite likely, he thought, that he might find it expedient to retire with all he could lay his hands on to the Continent.

He accordingly drew up a letter which, after considerable pressure, he induced Marion to copy, proposing that her annual income should be commuted for a lump sum. This he undertook to put before Sir Frederick.

“Only let me persuade him to accede to these terms and once get possession of the coin, and then, my sweet wife, I will trouble you no more. You shall go your way and I will go mine.” With which words he nodded carelessly to her and bade her good-bye.

But when, the next day, Solano laid the matter before his patron, he found that he had a more difficult task than he anticipated. The baronet was by no means in the best of humours. He had been more irritated at the breaking off his intended marriage and its cause than people would readily believe. He had been very much in earnest with regard to his cousin, and now not only was all that at an end, but also the idea of that more reputable and decorous life which he had pictured to himself as leading. The assumption of the position of a family man, endued with all domestic virtues and propriety, seemed for ever beyond his reach. Besides, nowadays, he was inclined to be close-handed. Unwilling to part with money except to obtain some desired equivalent, this proposed ten thousand pounds was, no doubt, a large sum to be called to part with. He at first flatly refused to have anything to do with it; vowed he had been a fool ever to have granted Marion such a preposterous allowance, and talked vaguely of submitting the question to arbitration of some sort. In vain Solano urged what a saving it would be to him in the long run; that he would probably have to pay the annuity for the next five-and-twenty years, whereas ten thousand pounds represented but little more than twelve years’ annual income. The baronet listened, but still gave an obdurate refusal. Then Solano changed his ground, and hinted that Lady Riversley was no more satisfied with the existing arrangement than he was; that the agreement guaranteeing her eight hundred a year had no real security

for its payment; and that she wanted a settlement, and would be likely to kick up a row, and "wash the family linen in public," if she did not get it.

Sir Frederick gave a low laugh as he replied: "She's rather too late. Our marriage is the property of the public already. curse her, and they are welcome to know all details concerning it, for all I care."

Then Solano began on another tack, and pointed out that it would be, perhaps, possible to beat Marion down in her terms. What if they should offer nine thousand?

At last the baronet listened with attention. The idea of striking a hard bargain, and so getting the best of any one, had strange attraction for him in these days. "It is too much," he said, "I'll not give it."

"What, shall I offer her eight thousand five hundred? though I doubt her taking it," rejoined Solano.

"No, tell her I'll give her eight, and not another cent," said Sir Frederick. "She may take it, or leave things as they are."

"Well I must do your bidding, but I can really give you no hope that Lady Riversley will accept such an offer as that."

"I don't care a rush whether she does or not," replied the baronet, and so the interview terminated.





## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

### ETHEL ASKS A QUESTION.

**W**HEN Ethel came to think over all that had passed between herself and John Hainton, she found scant cause for satisfaction with her doings of the last few weeks. How terribly she had misunderstood him, and how badly she had behaved towards him. In working out her wild scheme of retaliation, it seemed too probable that she had done her dearest friend an irretrievable injury. It was more than likely that she had separated John Hainton and Maude for life. One thing was quite clear to her, that she must make to Maude by letter as full a confession as she had made to Hainton in person. Then, again, she had also come to the conclusion that her intimate friend, Caroline Mangerston, was a false and treacherous woman. What were her reasons Ethel could not understand, but she thought there could be little doubt that Caroline had done her best to separate those two. She puzzled over it for some time, but could make nothing more out of it than that, from some cause or other, Miss Mangerston entertained a bitter dislike to Hainton, and was perfectly unscrupulous as to the means by which she might work him evil. The same afternoon Miss Clothele had received a line of adieu from Hainton, saying that after what had occurred he should leave town immediately; that under the circumstances he preferred wishing her good-bye by letter to

calling ; and enclosing the card which he had received for that fatal dance at Prince's Gate. And Ethel saw that he was right about the hour. It was hardly possible that Miss Mangerston could have made such a mistake by accident.

The first thing to be done was to write to Miss Riversley, and Ethel had covered a good three sheets of note paper before she had succeeded in explaining all her motives. "I am afraid, dearest Maude," she wrote, "that you may never forgive me ; in attempting to avenge the indignity which I considered had been put upon you, I have, it may be, done you more harm than if I had been your bitterest enemy. I can only implore of you one thing, when, as I fervently hope, Mr. Hainton, getting over the intoxication of the past few weeks, returns to his allegiance do not judge him too severely for this episode. Bear in mind that to bring him to my feet I stooped in a way that makes my cheeks tingle yet. I employed wiles and arts to which you would never condescend ; and, though I believe that I could have made him marry me, remember that he never asked me, nor do I believe ever really loved me. Forgive me, if you can, and rest assured that I shall refrain from all such scheming in future. Ever your own,  
"ETHEL CLOTHELE."

She had just finished and sealed this epistle, when Miss Mangerston entered the room.

"How did you get on this morning, Ethel ?" inquired that young lady, as she threw her hat on the table. "Did you flout that traitor as he deserved ? did you make Mr. Hainton understand that change of mind is not solely the prerogative of the male sex ? did you laugh in his face, and let him know that, when you married, it would be something a little higher than a Clumbershire bumpkin ?"

Miss Clothele looked gravely at the speaker. By the new light she had acquired from the scene of the morning, she saw in a manner that she had never as yet done, the rancorous spite and malice displayed by the fair Caroline.

"Our talk," she said, quietly, "took a very different turn from that you seem to have anticipated. Mr. Hainton asked no such question as you supposed, nor is it likely he ever will. What makes you dislike him so ?"



"I—oh! I don't know; we dislike people because—because, we don't like them; they have trod on our dress, not asked us to dance, or have been prosy when placed next us at dinner. He has been rude to me, Mr. Hainton; and you, what made you stay your vengeance? You know, Ethel, that man would have been on his knees to you this morning if you had so willed it."

"And I am very glad to say I did not," rejoined Miss Clothele. "What made you put twelve as the hour for my dance on Mr. Hainton's card?"

"I don't know that I did. I am not sure that I even wrote it. What makes you ask? Does he say so?"

"You wrote it, and you filled it in for that hour, for here it is;" and, as she spoke, Ethel lifted the card from the writing table.

"A slip of the pen, I suppose," replied Miss Mangerston, carelessly.

"And I suppose it was a slip of the tongue, your telling him Sir Frederick was engaged to marry Maude Riversley, when you knew that she was nothing of the kind."

"Excuse me, Ethel, you are giving me credit for more intelligence than I possessed. They were about a great deal together, and it was surely said at the time were going to marry. I can't be held responsible for the truth of every bit of gossip I hear, and give currency to."

"You know that is not quite what I mean. I accuse you of having deliberately plotted to separate Mr. Hainton and Maude Riversley, and further——"

"And further," interrupted Miss Mangerston, springing to her feet, "I suppose, of flirting with Mr. Hainton, till all London thought marriage must be the end of it; against which of us two do you think the biggest indictment could be framed? I think our social judges would pronounce me the minor culprit; but I hate Mr. Hainton, and I am as good a hater as the old bear of Bolt Court, and I hate this chit of a Clumbershire girl. She was coming between you and me, and I would ever work mischief if I could, to any woman that did that. Through you, if you had not blenched at the last moment, I should, at all events, have indulged part of my dislike to Mr. Hainton; you had him tied to the stake, and the whip, so

to speak, in your hands, and then you forbore to speak, and spared him all the scorn and derision which had been so carefully prepared for him."

"I have behaved badly enough, but my machinations were the mere outcome of your previous ones, nor did I ever in the first instance mean to carry them as far as I have done. A slight flirtation, in which Mr. Hainton could have been severely snubbed, was my first intention. After what you have said we can never be the same again. You declare you will allow no woman to come between yourself and me."

"I can't help it, Ethel, I cannot bear it!" exclaimed Miss Mangerston, bursting into tears; "you do not know how I suffer. I love you so very dearly, that to see anybody usurping my place in your confidence drives me to madness."

"I am sorry to pain you, Caroline," said Miss Clothele, gently; "but it is impossible we can go on so; I most certainly cannot pledge myself to have but one intimate friend. By your own confession you would never scruple to intrigue against any woman with whom I should form a close friendship. Don't think I want to quarrel with you, but for the future we must live on a different footing."

At this moment the door opened and the servant announced Colonel Leslie. Miss Mangerston snatched her hat from the table, and passing the colonel with a hurried bow and a half-muttered remark about a raging toothache, fled to her own room, not wishing to expose the traces of the late storm to Leslie's gaze.

"I am so glad to see you, Colonel Leslie," said Ethel, as they shook hands; "I have to thank you for your advice, which I have followed. It was not a pleasant business, as you may suppose. At one time Mr. Hainton threatened to be harder on me than you anticipated, but he let me off lightly at the end, and we parted good friends. He has left town for Clumbershire. I have found that I have thoroughly misunderstood him, and have been acting under most erroneous impressions."

"However, all is satisfactorily cleared up now, I trust."

"Yes, I think so," replied Ethel, smiling; "and though Mr. Hainton was not severe with me, don't think that I

escaped punishment altogether. He unintentionally gave me a slap in the face I well deserved."

"You speak metaphorically, of course; but surely Hainton, badly as you have behaved to him, did not let anything very bitter escape his lips."

"No, but without meaning it he inflicted a severe blow on my woman's vanity. I don't believe that Mr. Hainton was one bit in love with me. Knowing what I now know, and having had time to think it all over, I have come to the conclusion that he was seeking, in the first instance, to punish Maude in the same manner that I thought to punish him, and that finally he got out of his depth."

"That, I think, is very natural," rejoined Leslie, laughing. "As a rule, I fancy most of us would do that under the circumstances."

"Oh! I don't know," replied Ethel. "There are *some* of you keep your heads well enough, in spite of your professed devotion."

"You must allow me to differ with you; don't think me rude, but remember I have seen none of your admirers tried so hardly as Hainton."

Ethel raised her hand in deprecatory fashion as she said, "Don't scold me any more about that."

"Forgive me," he replied, "but you drew the allusion on yourself. However, I am not likely to offend again, as I have come to wish you good-bye, and good-bye, sad to say, for some time. My leave is curtailed, and I am unexpectedly ordered out to India, and consequently, for the next two years or so, England will know me no more."

"It is very sudden, is it not?" said Miss Clothele, in a low voice.

"Yes, but my second-in-command is, unfortunately, invalided home, so I must go out to take his, or rather, my own proper place."

"I shall miss you terribly," she murmured. "Who is to pull me out of my scrapes now?"

"Let us hope that you will get into no more; my interference was rash, but I am happy to think was successful. I shall take with me in my exile the proud satisfaction of having brought together again the two nicest girls I have met with during all my furlough."

"And which of us do you like best?" asked Ethel, quickly.

"Ah! that is a question which I regret I am not called upon to decide. One is not compelled, you see, to make up one's mind about who one likes best until one has serious intentions. To ask a girl to give up all the comforts of an English home and the pleasures of a London season, for a life on the Indian frontier, is to expect so much that it keeps one proof against temptation. It is safer not to ask questions which can only have negative replies."

He dropped out these last words slowly, for it faintly dawned across him that had he not regarded Hainton's acceptance as such a foregone conclusion, it was just possible that he might have been listened to with favour. He knew that he could retire from the service when he pleased, and that there was therefore no necessity that his wife need ever even go to India unless she liked.

"What nonsense, Colonel Leslie, as if any woman who really loved a man would not go to the end of the world with him if he asked her. She'd go to India, the Gold Coast, or Siberia, if necessary, of course she would. She might not like it, but she'd do it. And now, tell me, which do you like best, Maude or me?"

"Pray reconsider that question," said Leslie, in a voice which shook a little, in spite of his efforts to control himself; "you would not, I know, make a jest of me. Do think, after what has just passed, the interpretation I may put upon it."

There was a pause of nearly a minute before she spoke, during which Ralph Leslie's pulses throbbed more tumultuously than they had ever done in the fiercest strife.

"I know thoroughly what I am asking," she replied at length, and in a steady tone, though her cheeks flushed and her eyes dropped: "I am asking Ralph Leslie to take charge of me for life, and promising if he will take me to go with him where he wills."

Ere her speech was well finished Ralph Leslie was by her side, and, clasping both her hands in his, exclaimed, "This is more happiness than I ever dared to hope for. Tell me again, Ethel, if you really mean it."

"It is all too true, Ralph," she whispered. "I have asked you to marry me, and unless," she continued, with a faint smile, "you are rude enough to refuse, you will have to do it. You might have known, if you cared to know so, that I always liked you extremely, but it was not till the last few weeks, not, in short, until I entangled myself with Mr. Hainton, that I knew I loved you. Promise me one thing."

Leslie bowed his head.

"Promise me that you will try and forget that I had to reverse the usual order of things and ask you to be my husband; but I could not let you go to India, and you know that you would not have spoken if I had not."

"I fear that is beyond my power. While memory lasts I shall never forget that you had the courage to proffer the cup of happiness that I had never dared to hope was within my reach; but, promise for promise, I so dread the shipwreck of my newly-found happiness that I am going to ask you to pledge yourself that Miss Mangerston shall never come between us."

As he spoke the drawing-room door opened noiselessly and Miss Mangerston entered. Absorbed with themselves, the lovers failed to catch her light step upon the carpet, and at the sound of her own name she paused.

"I have a superstitious fear of her," he continued. "I think she had a good deal to do with the bringing about some of the past complications, and, above all, people say that more than one of your intimacies has been severed by her means."

"And people's observations do them infinite credit," cried Miss Mangerston, in clear and ringing tones. "Yes, I dissolved more than one friendship of Ethel's, and should, perhaps, have dissolved some more, but for this. Had I ever suspected, Colonel Leslie, that you were to become the favoured suitor of Ethel's, you would have found your love-story not quite so easy to bring to a satisfactory conclusion; but I did not. It is all over now, and if I have sinned against you, Ethel, I can only say I would sin once more if I had the opportunity. Others may love you better, but none will ever love you with the mad, passionate devotion that I have done: a devotion that brooked neither friend

nor lover should be nearer to you than myself. Had it not been for Colonel Leslie, I should have gradually made my peace with you, little though you may think it; but I despair of beating him. I shall leave you to-morrow morning. I cannot bear to stand second where I have so long stood first. You will make her leaving easy for mamma, I know, Ethel, for the sake of bygone days. As for you, Ralph Leslie, I shall hate you to my dying day, as having deprived me of the affection of the only human being whose love I really coveted." And then, before Leslie could interfere to prevent her, Caroline Mangerston sprang forward, covered Ethel's hand with passionate kisses, and then flinging it disdainfully from her, rushed from the room.

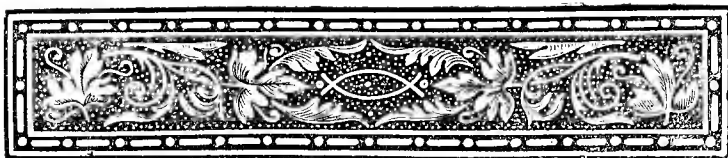
"Jealousy of your love, my dear, I think, has a little turned her head, and, perhaps, terror of her influence over you has a little upset my judgment; but you see I did not speak altogether without reason."

"You were right, Ralph, as you always have been, but you need never fear that Caroline or any one else can come between us now."

"Good-bye," he murmured. "I must endeavour to postpone this India journey if possible, and the sooner that is seen to the easier it will be."

"Then, good-bye; only remember one thing—If you must go, I go too."





## CHAPTER XXXIX.

### CAN YOU PARDON ME ?

**A**RTHUR RIVERSLEY, although he habitually shrunk from confronting the disagreeables of life, was now like the traditional rat in the corner, compelled to face them. His creditors were not only clamorous but threatening in their importunities. Money he *must* have, and there was only one quarter to which he could now possibly look for it. He must appeal to his father. That the Reverend Mortimer should receive the schedule of his son's debts and liabilities without considerable irritation, was hardly to be expected; but, having begun life as a younger son himself, and having never, contrary to the customs of the Riversleys, involved himself in pecuniary difficulties, he further swelled with all the virtuous indignation which those amongst us who have not fallen invariably feel against the sinners that succumb. A man of the Reverend Mortimer's means, who had always allowed his son a proportionately fair income, was certainly entitled to feel indignant at being called upon to pay a couple of thousand pounds, as the outcome of Arthur's University career and his first two years' residence at the Temple. He at first utterly declined to have anything further to say to him, saying that he must take the consequences of his own folly, and, for the future, he should make him a reduced allowance sufficient to procure him decent food, lodging, and clothes, as he could not see a Riversley quite go to the workhouse; but that for all the

luxuries of life he would henceforth have to depend upon his own exertions.

For the next week the Rectory circle was wondrous troubled. The Reverend Mortimer was no doubt an indolent man, but, when he has once made up his mind to be disagreeable, it is extraordinary the energy displayed by the most apathetic of individuals. The rector emptied the vials of his wrath not only upon the head of the delinquent, but was liberal enough to include the whole family. He snapped at the partner of his bosom as if she was answerable for her son's extravagance. He upbraided her and her daughters with having combined to bolster up Arthur in his belief of inheriting the Latimer estates. He sneered at their credulity, utterly ignoring that he had been quite as credulous as anybody after the first few weeks. When poor Maude gallantly faced the storm and attempted to do battle for her brother, she was sharply recommended to reserve her eloquence for her own use, as there were doubtless milliner's bills and the like liabilities coming in on her account.

"I am awfully sorry, Maude," said the young man, as he paced up and down the garden one morning with his sister, "to have let you all in for my row. My father might confine himself to pitching into me instead of distributing his amenities all round. And what I am to do exactly, I can't see. Cutting my income down to the minimum most assuredly won't help to pay my debts. You look harassed to death, and not a bit like the bright bonnie Maude we took up to London."

"Oh, never mind me," she replied. "What we have to think about is you at present. Papa may rage, and you will have more than one homily to listen to yet, but he will pay your debts in the end, never fear. But, Arthur, you really will have to work in the future. You have no Will-o'-the-wisp inheritance to dazzle you now. When papa has a little cooled down, I shall be able to make him see that some allowance ought to be made for the disturbing influence that exercised over you."

"You are a dear, good sister," he replied, with a faint smile. "My mother tells me you nearly got your poor little nose bit off in standing up for me only yesterday."



"Yes," she said, "papa generally listens to what I say, but he did set me down on that occasion, and replied that he had little doubt that he should shortly hear of my being in the like difficulties."

"My poor Maudie, I hope it is not so?" he inquired, anxiously. "I know that girls' dress costs so much in these days, and living with Miss Clothele and her set you must have been at times hard put to it."

"No, no," she said, shaking her head and laughing at the anxiety depicted on his countenance. "Don't think I am a fellow-criminal. It was hard work, and I am utterly ruined, but I managed to make both ends meet. Mamma's sisters were very kind to me, and came to the rescue more than once."

"And you don't mind that all is at an end between you and Frederick."

"You know, Arthur," she said, gently, "that arrangement was all your doing—entered into at your persuasion—and, as far as I was concerned, mainly to extricate you from your difficulties. It was a great relief to me when it came to an end, but, from what I have since learned, I can only say I am supremely thankful that I am free. Not even to save you, Arthur, could I have consented to that engagement knowing what I know now."

"What! you have heard of still worse doings on Frederick's part?"

"No, I have heard nothing whatever about him. Don't tease me to tell you what it is I have learned—that is my secret, a secret which I sincerely hope to confess to you one of these days."

He looked wistfully into her face as if to read her thoughts, but, colouring slightly under his keen scrutiny, she turned away and walked towards the house. He followed her slowly, feeling no little remorse that he should have so worried her in London to serve his own ends. He was very fond of his eldest sister, and the resolute way in which she stood up for him now in the hour of disgrace, made him feel still more penitent for bullying her into a betrothal which she had disliked. He could no longer shut his eyes to the selfishness of his own conduct. He had indeed more glozed it over than been blind to it at

the time. How Arthur Riversley will bear adversity if it should come upon him may be doubted, but he has, at all events, shown inability as yet to bear too much prosperity. In the course of the next two or three days Arthur had to endure more than one philippic from the irate rector. At the end of that time the Reverend Mortimer's wrath began to calm. He reflected that he should have to pay his son's debts in the end, and that it was of no use making his own family as well as himself exceedingly uncomfortable. Arthur was formally summoned to the study, and there his father, entirely dropping the style of snappish and irritable harangue to which he had so far condemned the culprit, addressed him in good, honest, straightforward terms, pointing out to him that though, in consideration of his being only yet at the outset of life, and his head having been a little turned by this unfortunate will, his debts should be paid for him this time, that he must contrive to live upon his allowance for the future, and depend for further increase to his income entirely upon his own exertions.

"Remember," said the rector, in conclusion, "that your mother and sisters will chiefly pay the penalty of your extravagance: there will be no London for them for the next three years."

Arthur winced at his father's final words. He felt more remorse for his folly than he had as yet done. He had never reflected that his sisters would probably have to bear the punishment for his wrong-doings—and they had been very kind to him of late; even Bessie had forbore to banter him. Is it not always so? Do not the women of his family always pet and pity the black sheep in his day of retribution? An "only son!" one can easily imagine his mother and sisters sympathised with and made as much of him as if he had been the victim of undeserved misfortune.

Arthur walked forth from his father's sanctum, after the wont of young gentlemen under such circumstances, filled with penitence and high resolve—high resolve, alas! which so often ends in producing no results.

John Hainton was not likely to be long at Enderly without coming across the Riversley family. He met the

rector on the Clumford bench. He encountered the young ladies in the streets of the town ; and Maude, though she greeted him shyly, yet no longer assumed towards him that chilling manner which had so repelled him upon the few occasions that they had met this year in town. He began to turn over in his mind whether it was not possible to put things right between them. He wondered whether she was aware of what had taken place between him and Ethel, or whether she still looked upon him as either engaged, or about to be, to Miss Clothele. He thought, and no doubt rightly, that if Maude could but be made acquainted with the truth of that episode it would assist his cause considerably ; but then he saw no means of doing that, unless he should tell her himself, and John Hainton pondered deeply as to whether he had the courage to do that. The report that he was about to be married to the London heiress had, as he anticipated, reached Clumber-shire, and he was exposed, upon more than one occasion, to awkward congratulations on the subject. It struck him, however, as somewhat singular that the Reverend Mortimer never alluded to it in any way, and at length he became sanguine that the rectory family were in possession of the truth. He would call, and be guided by circumstances. It really was incumbent upon him to call, he argued, as a matter of ordinary courtesy, and, by way of giving " circumstances " every chance, he selected a day when he knew the Reverend Mortimer had a parish-meeting to attend, and when he had also ascertained that a neighbouring cricket-club had invoked Arthur's assistance.

Mrs. Riversley received him with the warm welcome he had ever counted on at Clumford Rectory, and Maude, too, seemed pleased to see him. As for Miss Bossie, a couple of years had somewhat mellowed her boisterous manner. She was eighteen now, and, though not fully admitted to Maude's confidence, had a pretty shrewd inkling of how matters stood. She did sisterly service upon this occasion ; rattled away and found talk for the whole party at luncheon, protested Mr. Hainton must come and see the garden afterwards, and when she had brought him and Maude to the verge of the ha-ha, for the purpose of admi-

ring some beds of scarlet geranium, bordered with lobelia, vanished as suddenly as discreetly.

"Miss Riversley, will you pardon me if I touch upon a subject I have greatly at heart? It is nothing much to you, perhaps, but it is of great importance in my eyes. I have been the credulous victim of much misrepresentation. I may say more than that, I have been, with *malice prepense*, made to believe that things were very different from what they really were. I know I am not making myself clear. It is so difficult to explain without inculcating others—I cannot do that."

"Would it help you if I told you that I had a letter from Ethel Clothele, about a week ago?"

"Yes; I think so. It depends upon how much she told you. But she owes me some little reparation, and I think would behave generously. I wonder whether you can also?"

"I don't know that I have anything to behave generously about," returned Maude, vainly trying to look unconscionous. "She said Miss Mangerston had made a deal of mischief between her and her friends, of whom I am one. She wrote and explained herself, in my case, and asked me to forgive her."

"And did she not ask you to forgive me?"

It was a lucky shot, and Maude's telltale cheeks told Hainton that Ethel had made full confession.

"I don't know what I have to forgive, Mr. Hainton," she faltered.

"My darling, don't fence with me any longer; I see Ethel Clothele has told you everything, that you know the whole story of Miss Mangerston's treachery and my madness. Believe me, Maude, if I feigned a passion for Ethel, it was in all the recklessness of despair, in all the fury of jealousy. I never loved woman but you; and before I was compelled to depart at an hour's notice to America, had hoped that I was in a fair way to make you love me. When I returned, the first thing I heard was of your engagement. The first time I met you, your own bearing, and Miss Mangerston's lips, confirmed it. Can you make no allowance, Maude, for the bitter disappointment I endured? Did Ethel tell you what took me to America?"

"Ethel has told me *all*, Mr. Hainton," replied the girl,

in a low, but clear voice. "From the great service you rendered her, to what she is pleased to call——" and here Maude stopped.

"Our treachery to you," said Hainton. "Can you forgive us? Can you pardon me, so far as to let things be between us as they were before I went to America?"

And, though Maude's answer was an almost inaudible monosyllable, yet it seemed perfectly satisfactory and intelligible to John Hainton.





## CHAPTER XL.

“THEY WILL SAY I KILLED HIM.”

**S**IR FREDERICK, still lingering in town for the purpose of concluding the arrangement he has finally entered into with Marion through the agency of Solano—to wit—the payment of eight thousand pounds down in lieu of any annuity, was startled one morning by a letter from Mr. Prossiter. In it the lawyer informs him that Solano is identical with one Edward Somers, and then proceeds to depict the career of Mr. Somers in language more forcible than flattering. Mr. Prossiter is so far right in his conjectures, that further than some languid feeling of surprise that he should not have become acquainted with his secretary's real name during all the years he had known him, Sir Frederick felt no whit astonished. From what he himself knew of Solano's career, he was quite prepared to find that part of his life, of which he was in ignorance, had been of much the same pattern ; but the lawyer would have been thoroughly satisfied with the dramatic effect he had produced could he have seen the start which the baronet gave when he read that this Somers had a very pretty wife still living in London, though passing at present under the name of Beecher.

In an instant Sir Frederick saw how he had been duped, and at once began to ponder how he was to turn the tables on the bold confederates that had plotted such a *coup* as eight thousand pounds at his expense. It was not that he

felt altogether resentment. In the life that he had led abroad, he had learned to look upon such transactions in a spirit of liberality not accorded to them by right-thinking people. Against Marion, in particular, he felt no anger; he was merely amazed that she should have had the *hardiesse* to attempt such an imposition. Had it concerned her alone, he would probably have made a jest of the whole affair, and in the exultation of being quit of all obligations as far as she was concerned, have laughed at the happy conclusion of a distasteful *liaison*. But with Solano it was different. He had, sad to say, a morbid jealousy of this his mentor in vice. He could not bear to be outwitted by this man who had so degraded him, this man who had gradually laughed away his sense of honour, who had persuaded him that *all* was fair in gaming, that the world was one continual game of "beggar my neighbour," in which if you did not beggar him, your neighbour beggared you, and the fewer your scruples and the greater your dexterity, the more likely you were to rise a winner from either card, hazard table, or the battle of life generally. He was at once bitten with a feverish anxiety to beat Solano, but it must be to beat him in his own way, and he quite laughed to himself as he thought of the little surprise he should now be able to concoct for that worthy's edification. He did not in the least contemplate invoking the assistance of the law, but to lure Solano on to the completion of his plot, and at the last moment show that he was in full possession of every particular concerning it, and had it in his power to hand the conspirators over to the police if he so willed.

Marion Somers (to call her by her real name) was the daughter of the leading doctor in a good-sized country town. Just twenty years ago she fell in love with Edward Somers, a dashing young corn-factor, who had just started in business in the same place. The old doctor, her father, demurred much to this marriage. Somers had already acquired the reputation of being rather too fond of cards and race-courses; still he was apparently well-to-do, and as the young lady was one-and-twenty, and determined to have her own way, the doctor made the best of it, and after some little delay, the marriage took place. But in a country town the community not only interest themselves, but

contrive to be exceedingly well informed regarding their neighbour's doings, and Mr. Somers speedily found that the results of his speculations on the card-table or on the race-course, afforded food for much gossip, and were a matter of much curiosity amongst the people around him. This was no doubt flattering, but it did not at all meet with the approbation of Mr. Somers. He was by no means the man to hide his light under a bushel, but objected strongly even then, although with much less reason than he had subsequently, to the fierce light of publicity being thrown upon his proceedings. He pronounced the old town too dull and stagnant to create a really good business in, and announced his intention of migrating to London. Here he substituted the Stock Exchange for the corn business, and his card-playing and race-going were conducted on a very much larger scale.

Some men, I verily believe, are born innately bad—rogues from their very cradle—and Solano was one of these. It was neither difficulties nor distress that drove him from the right path. He took the wrong from sheer perversity. He had excellent business capabilities, and could honestly have made a handsome income, only it pleased him better to make money by chicanery. The utter worthlessness of the man's character was gradually revealed to his unfortunate wife. All love between them was speedily at an end. There had not, indeed, been much left to carry with them to the metropolis, and then Solano deliberately set himself to kill Marion's self-esteem. He traded upon her beauty to decoy young men to his dinner parties, which were invariably followed by cards. He incited her to flirt with such of their guests as were wealthy, and showed a taste for play, and though it was never averred that Marion had gone astray, it was undoubtedly known that Mrs. Somers would go very far in her flirtations. Then came the grand crash. That pleasant villa in the suburbs, plate, pictures, everything, down to Marion's personal jewellery, were swept away, and Solano fled to the Continent, leaving his wife to subsist as she best could; his last words to her being—"If you do not see or hear of me within a twelvemonth, you may consider I am dead, at all events as far as you are concerned."



Fortunately for herself, Marion had some three thousand pounds which had been left her by an old aunt, and it was so tightly tied up, that neither she, nor her scoundrel of a husband, could possibly touch it; and upon the interest of this she contrived to scrape along until, some twelvemonth after Solano's flight, she met with Fred Riversley. He fell honestly in love with her, and when we remember what Marion's life had been, we cannot much wonder that she lent a willing ear to his passionate pleading.

Deserted by her husband, and left to maintain herself upon an income that would not, a little while ago, have gone far towards paying her dressmaker's bill, Marion's existence had been dreary in the extreme. She could not but contrast the good-looking Guardsman with the rather under-bred men who had hitherto surrounded her and paid her such undisguised admiration. Fred Riversley was of a class that she had hardly as yet come across. His attentions were very sweet to her—and she wound up by falling as passionately in love with him as if she had been a girl in her teens. She owed slight consideration to a husband who had shown none whatever to her, and speedily yielded to Riversley's entreaties to make her home with him. He was at that time revelling in all the flush of the "Hermit's" Epsom victory, of which mention is made in the first chapter of this history. His winnings on that occasion enabled him to indulge Marion in many of the luxuries to which she had been formerly accustomed, and she, though unwittingly, contributed not a little to accelerate his ruin. She knew nothing about his real means, and, while living with her husband, had been accustomed to spend money lavishly. This was, perhaps, the happiest time of Marion's life. She lulled herself into the idea that Somers would never again cross her path, and in the delirium of her passion persuaded her lover to marry her. Though eight years his senior, there were few handsomer women in town than Marion Somers at that time. A little later came Riversley's crash, and Marion was doomed to see her "second husband" follow in the steps of the first. Before his hurried departure it had been agreed between them that she had better drop his name. The few people with whom they came in contact

regarded Marion as Mrs. Riversley only by courtesy, and it was accordingly settled that she should take the name of Gardiner, which had belonged to some of her mother's family.

Sir Frederick, after much meditation, came to the conclusion that in the first instance he would call at Cleveland Lodge and see Mrs. Somers. He felt a little curious to see how far she would have the courage to persevere in her imposture. He, accordingly, the day after he received Mr. Prossiter's letter, presented himself at Cleveland Lodge and sent in his card. Nervous and apprehensive as she was of discovery, Marion guessed, the moment she saw it, that he knew all. He was scarcely likely, she deemed, to pay her a visit, unless the knowledge had come to him that she was not his wife. "He has learned," she muttered bitterly, "that I am only a woman who dared to risk a bigamous marriage for love of him." She poured a stiffish dose of sal volatile into a little cold water, drank it off, and then braced herself to confront her visitor. The dread of danger is usually worse than its actual reality; now that the bolt has actually fallen, Marion's nerve reasserts itself. It was with head erect that she swept regally into her drawing-room to receive Sir Frederick.

He rose and bowed low in return to the stately bend with which she greeted him—"I must apologise, madam, for this intrusion," he said, in tones of studied coldness, "but I thought, perhaps, that the business matters between us could be better arranged by an interview than through a third person."

She was not a whit deceived by his speech. She felt just as sure that he was in the possession of the truth as when she first read his card. "It would have been better, Sir Frederick," she replied, in tones cold and steady as his own, "that you could have met me at our first interview with that friendship which, at least, I had a right to expect in memory of old days. You would have found no disposition to impose hard terms upon you. I would have conformed to any reasonable wishes on your part. You fell into the mistake," she continued, with a tinge of sarcasm in her voice, "of bullying a woman who was fool enough to remember that she had once loved you."

"And suppose, madam, I was to point out to you that

I am really unable to find such a sum as eight thousand pounds. Would you consent to some considerable abatement of it?"

He was playing with her as the cat plays with the mouse in its claws—and she knew it as well as he did.

"I would say, you shall give me what you can. I would ask you for nothing, if it were not that, if I fail to find something approaching that sum, then the worst that can come to me will befall me."

"I find you much more amenable to reason," he said, with a sneer, "than when you did me the honour to call upon me in Chesterfield Street. Perhaps a suspicion that I have been somewhat enlightened of late regarding your past history may in some measure account for it."

"There is surely no need for further fencing," she replied, scornfully; "whatever you may have to allege against me, say it."

"I don't know that I have so very much to say," replied the baronet; "I certainly have discovered that you showed a very pretty talent for mendacity concerning your first husband."

"Yes," she cried, passionately; "I lied to you in all but my name; but remember what I had gone through. The pinched starved life I was living when we met. I, who had been accustomed to flowers, carriages, and the free command of money. I had changed all this for a garret, hard fare, and merino dresses. The admiration to which I had been accustomed was gone. Holding myself a widow in fact, though not in reality, there was not one of all the men, who had feasted at my husband's table, to whom I would have surrendered myself. At my husband's bidding I lavished smiles on these men, which were repaid with bracelets, flowers, and insult, if not in word, in manner. Your delicate homage was so different to anything I had before experienced. What wonder that I listened to you! I thought you rich. You offered me the luxury of my old life, combined with the greatest luxury of all, a protector whom I could—nay, did love—in the place of one whom I had learned to hate, fear, and despise. If I urged you to marry me, it was because I so feared to lose you."

She ceased. Sir Frederick paused for a moment, rather astonished at the storm he had called forth. Was she acting? he thought. He knew too well how women can counterfeit on these occasions.

"Yet," he said, at last, "in spite of all your present protestations, when you paid me your visit of a few weeks back, and knew that I must regard myself as legally married to you, you asserted your determination to insist upon every right the law allowed you."

"Can you make no allowance, Frederick, for an angry woman, who, seeking you with all the memories of the old days crowding thick upon her, was bitterly disappointed with the coldness of her reception?"

"And you, madam," he returned, fiercely, "if you deem I deal harshly with you, I, in my turn, will ask if you can make no allowance for the bitterness of a man's disappointment, who finds his forthcoming marriage broken off through the malicious interposition of a former mistress."

"Spare me," she cried. "It's the truth—I swear it—I had cheated myself into the belief that Somers was dead, at all events to me. I had never heard from or of him since the day he left me. I did not know he was even alive till he called upon me here on your account."

"And since that, I suppose, he has pulled the strings, and your letters have been written at his dictation."

She bowed her head.

"And now may I ask what share of the plunder does this precious husband of yours claim?"

"All," she replied, in a low tone.

The baronet indulged in a low whistle. Nobody was better aware of Somers' or Solano's rapacity than he was, but he certainly, up to this, had looked upon it that the confederates had purposed dividing the spoils between them, in some shape. "And yet," he said, "with all this kindly feeling towards me, in memory of old days, you would have connived at my being robbed to this extent—a robbery, too, which was to benefit you not one shilling."

"I dare not do otherwise," she returned. "I always *was* afraid of him, and I have a greater dread of him now

than ever. He threatened, if I did not do as he ordered me, to come and live here. I so loathe him, that I would suffer anything rather than that ; and forgive me," she continued, " but I have no longer courage to face poverty. He vowed to have his share of my home, and all that I have, if I failed to obtain this money from you."

"A mighty pretty confession," exclaimed a voice, hoarse with passion, that came from the lawn outside ; " but as that whimpering fool has thought fit to make it," exclaimed Solano, stepping through the open French window, "I shall change my ground. You have scored a trick, Riversley, and now I want to know what the devil you are doing in my house ?"

The sullen scowl on the baffled ruffian's brow was not lost upon Riversley. He read Solano's rage and disappointment in his face, and revelled in it. It was his hour of triumph, and he intended to make the most of it. He could recall times when Solano had meted out cynical and authoritative commands, which had made his pulses tingle, and—only he was too deep in the toils—would have been fiercely resented. Now it was his turn. His old tutor had tried to deceive him, and he had him at his mercy.

"You always were good at brag, Solano, and I know you have plenty of nerve, but, my friend, you will have to face twelve of your countrymen for this impudent attempt to extort money."

"Good. We shall see what will come of it ; the town will understand Sir Frederick Riversley a good deal better than they do now before my defence is concluded. As for my sweet wife there, she will have been taught a lesson in the obedience she owes to a husband."

Marion literally cowered before the vengeful glance that Solano threw at her. Her terror of him was only too evident. Sir Frederick could be ruthless as any man in his behaviour towards a woman, but he could not have raised his hand against her ; to him it appeared that Marion was in dread of physical violence. He had no intention of allowing that, while at the same time it amused him to see the usually cool and passive Solano thrown so utterly off his balance. In the gratification of his own

resentment he resolved to goad and still further madden him.

"You look like a wife-beater," he said, in cool contemptuous tones, after a pause of some few seconds. "Remember, I don't intend to permit any violence to this lady."

"How I arrange my differences with my wife is no concern of Sir Frederick Riversley's. I certainly don't mean that you shall interfere between us. Now, perhaps, you will be good enough to go."

"No," rejoined the baronet, coolly. "I shall send for a policeman, and give you in charge. I cannot leave this woman at the mercy of your brutal temper."

Solano made a step or two forward, but mastering himself by a supreme effort exclaimed, fiercely, "Give me in charge! On what grounds, pray?"

"Go, oh! for Heaven's sake, go," cried Marion, as she threw herself between them. "You can do nothing for me, I have returned to my slavery. When he looks like that, I know of old he means mischief."

"Nonsense, Marion, I have little cause to love you at present, but you stood to me once, and I can't leave you at the mercy of a craven tiger like that."

Solano's eyes glittered with all the fierce cruelty of the animal he had been compared to, as he sprang forward on his foe. Fred Riversley had been counted a good man with his hands in his old Guardsman days, and, swinging Marion on one side, met his adversary's rush with a straight left-hander that sent him reeling back with the blood trickling from his lip. But Solano had never lacked animal courage; his blood was now thoroughly up, and no sooner had he recovered himself than he dashed in again at his adversary like a wild cat. He would probably have had but little chance with the baronet, on account of the latter's pugilistic knowledge, but he received unforeseen assistance from Marion once more throwing herself between them. Solano, now thoroughly mad with rage, struck her to the ground without a moment's hesitation. She clutched at Sir Frederick as she fell, and he, on his part attempted to save her; the consequence was, that for a moment he was almost defenceless. Solano seized

the opportunity quick as lightning, struck his adversary in the face with all his strength, and immediately closed with him, and then began a savage struggle for the mastery between the two men, that from the occasional fierce ejaculations that escaped their lips boded scant mercy for the conquered. They were pretty evenly matched, but Solano, it was speedily evident, was the more powerful man of the two. They swayed backwards and forwards in their strenuous efforts to throw each other. More than one chair, or table strewn with drawing-room knick-knacks, was overturned as the two men reeled against them. And now once more the contest brings them back to where Marion still lies senseless on the floor. Again is the luckless woman destined to work her ally's undoing. As Solano forces his foe backwards, Sir Frederick's feet catch in the prostrate woman's draperies; with a supreme effort Solano hurls him backwards, and he comes to the ground, his head crashing heavily against the fender as he does so. Solano rained a shower of blows upon his senseless victim's face, and then, springing to his feet, gazes round for a minute at the scene of confusion.

Casting one glance at the bruised and battered countenance of his fallen foe, he muttered, "A settlement you hardly expected, my worthy friend, I fancy," and then proceeded to wipe the traces of the contest, as far as possible, from his own face. He next raised his wife, dashed some water in her face, and endeavoured to recover her. "The jade," he growled, "it's like her perversity. I have no time to spare, and of course want all the money she has in the house, and she persists in remaining insensible. She had, I recollect of old, a knack of fainting away for considerably over the customary period. But I must be off. The sooner I make tracks for the Continent again the better. Riversley, when he comes round, is not likely to stop at anything in his thirst for vengeance." Here Solano once more looked towards his senseless foe; an uneasy expression crossed his countenance as he did so. Another second and he was kneeling by Riversley's side, and drawing back the lid, peered anxiously into the prostrate man's eye. Another moment and his nervous fingers

were feeling for the baronet's pulse. A great awe fell upon him as neither heart nor pulse responded to his touch. He then raised the head, and saw to his horror a frightful wound in the back of the skull, the consequence of Sir Frederick falling across the fender. Solano turned white to his very lips as an inkling of the truth flashed across him. "Dead! can he be dead?" he muttered, as he gently lifted the baronet on to the hearth-rug; "and they will say it is I that have killed him." Solano, as it has been said, had plenty of animal courage, but it was small wonder that he shivered now as he realised what he had done, and what would be the probable consequences to himself. For a minute or two he paused to think what he had best do. Then, as it flashed across him that no one had seen him enter the house, the instinct of self-preservation urged him to seek safety in flight. Silently he vanished through the French window, with an execration upon the evil destiny that had caused him ever to enter it, and as he sped through the sunshine thought with horror of the awful stillness he had left behind.







## CHAPTER XLI.

### TRIED FOR MURDER.



QUARTER-OF-AN-HOUR had elapsed, and the solemn stillness remains unbroken. Then Marion battles her way back slowly to sensibility, raises herself, and with a dazed expression looks round upon the scene of Fred Riversley's death. Almost at once his inanimate body catches her eye, and, with a shriek that rings through the house, she rushes to the bell, pulls it, and though not comprehending the truth, falls by his side in a fit of hysterical weeping. That shriek and that violent peal on the bell, so different from their mistress's usual quiet ring, brought both cook and parlour-maid to the drawing-room as quick as their legs could carry them. At the sight of her sobbing mistress, the disordered room, and the baronet's prostrate form, the parlour-maid gave a shriek and looked upon the verge of following Marion's example; but old Catherine was made of sterner stuff; she seized the girl by the arm, shook her sharply, and exclaimed—

“No nonsense, you fool; you haven't got time to faint; run for the doctor as fast as you can, and leave me to take care of the mistress.”

The girl found the doctor fortunately at home, and he was speedily on the scene of action. A minute or two sufficed to show him that Marion's was a case of violent hysterics, brought on, in all probability, by some great

shock; telling Catherine to get her mistress to bed as soon as possible, and that he would come and see her again in a few minutes, he turned his attention to the other patient, and then his countenance became very grave; both pulse and heart were silent; and as he surveyed Fred Riversley's battered face, it was but too evident that he had met a violent death. When he raised the head, the cause of death became at once visible; "Back of the skull driven completely in," he muttered, "no doubt by a blow, and a tremendously heavy blow, too, it must have been; inflicted probably by a thick stick or bludgeon; it might have been a poker," and the doctor glanced round for the fire-irons, but there were none, they having been removed for the summer. When the baronet fell, he not only fell with all his weight on the back of his head, but with the whole of Solano's on the top of him. Had he been left in his original position, the doctor would have perhaps come to a different conclusion as to the cause of the blow; but, as we know, Solano lifted his luckless foe on to the hearth-rug before his flight. Having decorously composed the corpse, the doctor proceeds to shut and fasten the French windows, then quitting the apartment locks the door and, taking the key with him, proceeds in search of Catherine. Handing the key over to her, he cautions her against letting any one into the room before the arrival of the police, to whom, he tells her, he must at once give information as to what has occurred. He then follows her to her mistress's bedside, but Marion is in no state to give any account of what has taken place, even if it had been the doctor's province to inquire concerning it. She passes from one fit of hysterics to another, and having further prescribed and given assurance to Catherine that he will call again in the course of a few hours, the doctor took his departure. He shook his head gravely as he walked down the little drive, and said to himself, "The officers of the law, I fear, will get nothing but passionate weeping and incoherent utterances from Mrs. Beecher for the next few days."

The news of Sir Frederick Riversley's murder spread through London like wild-fire, and was to the public, in the first instance, so shrouded in mystery, as to occasion

very great excitement. From Marion, as the doctor anticipated, the police could extract no information; all that the parlour-maid could say was that she admitted the dead man, who had rather astonished her by asking for Lady Riversley. She had admitted him because her mistress was expecting a Lady Riversley to stay with her, and had given orders that any visitors who might inquire for Lady Riversley were to be shown in, and that upon one previous occasion, another gentleman had called upon a like errand. This, and the medical evidence, was all that the papers contained concerning the crime. Nobody had been known to enter the house about the time of the murder, nor known to leave it, and the public began to speculate actually as to whether Mrs. Beecher was herself the culprit.

But Scotland Yard had strong grounds for believing that they knew all about it. Inspector Wilkinson at once confided to his brother officers, as they sat in conclave, that Solano, Sir Frederick's right-hand man, was no other than the notorious Edward Somers, and that the *soi-disant* Mrs. Beecher was, he felt pretty sure, his wife. Now Wilkinson, thanks to the investigation he had conducted for Mr. Prossiter, knew not only where Solano lodged, but also what were his habitual haunts. It was speedily ascertained that Solano had not been seen at his lodgings since the murder; and not four hours after Solano fled from Maida Vale, the electric wire conveyed the intelligence that he was wanted on the charge of murder, not only to all the leading English sea-ports, but to all the police centres of the Continent; and the fugitive was far better known to the Continental police than he was to the English. In the meanwhile, a warrant for his apprehension was taken out, and Inspector Wilkinson and his myrmidons were busily seeking at railway stations and amongst cab-drivers for by what route the criminal had escaped to the Continent.

But a man like Solano would pretty well divine all that the police would do under these circumstances.

"Points against me," he thought to himself as, leaving Cleveland Lodge behind him, he walked steadily away in the direction of Kilburn;—"They know I am Riversley's

right-hand man. Secondly, I have been closely watched lately. Points in my favour: Nobody noticed me enter Cleveland Lodge, or saw me leave it; but no, I cannot brazen it out. He must have got his information somewhere, and whoever is in possession of that information knows, naturally, that Marion is my wife, and will naturally suspect me of being in some measure concerned in this disaster."

But Solano quite laughed at the idea of attempting to escape to the Continent. That no more occurred to him than it did to go near his own lodgings. He tramped steadily forwards towards Kilburn, turned up the Belsize Road, then, having made his way across Primrose Hill and the Regents Park, turned up the Euston and Pentonville Roads, until he came to Islington.

Accustomed as he was to depart without beat of drum, Solano habitually carried a large sum of ready money about with him. On arrival at Islington, he did a little shopping: filling his pockets, and carrying one or two small parcels, he finally bought a very modest carpet bag, and having bestowed his accumulations within it, asked permission to leave it at the shop at which he purchased it for an hour. By the end of that time he was in possession of a quiet lodging in St. Peter's Street, and proceeded to fetch his carpet bag. His plan was to remain here tranquilly for the next three or four months, till such time, in short, as the hue and cry had abated, then to make his way across by the night mail to Ireland, and joining the Allan steamer at Lough Foyle, make his way through Canada to the United States, and but for the veriest accident, there was little doubt that he would have succeeded.

A fortnight had elapsed, and, though the public were now in possession of the main facts of the case, and knew that Solano, *alias* Somers, was the suspected man, yet Scotland Yard was utterly baffled as to what had become of the supposed criminal. The more knowledge they had of the facts, the more excited the public grew about the case. They were aware that Mrs. Beecher, the woman in custody, and who was actually present when the murder was committed, was, in reality, Mrs. Somers, and had

claimed to be Lady Riversley, and that it was this claim which, deemed valid by the murdered man, had occasioned the rupture of his marriage with his cousin. In a *cause célèbre*, that concerns one of themselves, the interest of society knows no bounds. Applications for seats, should Solano's trial come to pass, were likely to be as numerous as for a first night of Albani, Patti, or other great star of the operatic world. Inspector Wilkinson, woefully disappointed at Solano's mysterious disappearance, once more takes counsel with old Sam Williams.

"If the earth had opened and swallowed him up," quoth Mr. Wilkinson, ruefully, "he couldn't have vanished more completely, and left no trail behind him."

"It's an awkward case," returned Williams, "I always told you he was about the foxiest I ever was in chase of. That you can't find out how he left London, nor track him at the sea-ports, nor hear of him on the Continent, I am not surprised at. I should think it's a great question whether he has left London; but that he is still in England, I'd bet level money; but where or how you are to come across him, now, I honestly confess I can't make out."

But accident revealed what seemed likely to baffle all the exertions of the police. Old Sam Williams happened to have a friend who kept a comfortable hostelry at the corner of St. Peter's Street, and, smoking a pipe one evening in a snug little parlour behind the bar, to Williams' astonishment, the very man for whose apprehension there was no less than three hundred pounds reward offered, and for the seizure of whom, all the energies of Scotland Yard had been brought to bear, walked quietly in, and called for a glass of brandy-and-water. The crafty ex-detective's eyes twinkled. "Jimmy," he said to his friend, "here's a pile of money in our pockets—just you be ready to come to my assistance the minute I hollers for you. I have no time to say more." He then quickly opened the parlour door, passed through the hatch of the bar, and as soon as he found himself between Solano and the door, threw himself upon him, crying, "Help me, Jimmy, help!"

Solano was taken utterly aback, and, before he could shake the old man off, the landlord had come to his assistance. The pot-boy, and other bystanders, of course took

part with the master of the house, though only suspecting the culprit had been guilty of ringing the changes or other petty larceny. Solano speedily succumbed to the odds against him, and fiercely demanded the cause of this unwarrantable attack.

"It won't do—the game's up—I am old Sam Williams, of the detective force of your time, and I tell you, Ned Somers, I know you."

From that out Solano never opened his lips. He knew that Williams was right, and that the game was indeed up, now that he was recognized as Edward Somers. He remained mute as a hunted wolf, until he was duly handed over to the police, and the morning journals contained a sensational paragraph, headed, "Capture of Edward Somers, *alias* Solano, supposed murderer of Sir Frederick Riversley."

But although there could be little moral doubt about Solano's guilt, the crown lawyers, when they came to get up the case, found that to prove it legally was not quite so easy. As wife of the prisoner, Marion's lips were sealed. She could bear testimony neither against him nor in his favour. Then, on the day of the murder there was no one who could say that he was ever actually on the premises; no one had either seen him enter or leave the house. But in spite of these points in his favour, when the trial took place circumstantial evidence rolled up against him and accumulated like a snowball. The dead man's bankers produced an order to pay £200 quarterly to Mrs. Beecher's account. That Mrs. Beecher was Mrs. Somers was not only admitted, but proved by the defence. The parlour-maid testified to admitting a Mr. Solano upon two occasions to see her mistress, and swore positively that Mr. Solano and the prisoner at the bar were one and the same individual. That Mrs. Beecher, on the strength of her bigamous marriage, had extorted an allowance of eight hundred a year from the late Sir Frederick, the evidence went satisfactorily to show. That Solano had been a species of half-secretary, half-confidential agent, to the unfortunate baronet was well known. Amongst the dead man's papers were found some indirect memoranda, which, read by the lights the court possessed, could only refer to

the arrangement between Mrs. Beecher and Sir Frederick having been negotiated by Solano. Witnesses were found who had seen the prisoner in the vicinity of Cleveland Lodge on the day and about the time that the crime must have been committed, and finally came the damning fact of his having absconded before it was possible any rumour of the murder could have come to his ears.

The circumstantial evidence was overwhelming, and the prisoner's counsel, in his speech for the defence, confined himself principally to reducing the crime from murder to manslaughter. He argued eloquently that this was no cold-blooded, premeditated assassination, but the result of a violent quarrel between the two men, which, unfortunately for his client, had terminated fatally. He urged that the irony of fate had never been more relentlessly displayed, that the one witness who could have cleared his client of the fouler charge had her lips closed from her hapless relationship to the prisoner. "What motive," he asked, "could his client have had in compassing Sir Frederick Riversley's death? He was holding an honourable and probably lucrative position under the dead man. That he was a party to, or if they liked better, a prime mover in, the audacious imposition so successfully attempted by his wife, there could be little doubt. But it was palpable to every one that the benefit the Somers were to derive from the fraud must terminate with Sir Frederick's life. Was it not more likely that the baronet, having detected the imposition practised on him, went to Cleveland Lodge to inform Mrs. Somers that her impudent lie was discovered; that there encountering the prisoner, Sir Frederick's bitter reproaches led to high words between them. Upon finding the deception practised upon him by his confidential servant, it was likely that the dead man would not have measured his words, but spoken his mind strongly. The altercation would probably wax higher and higher, till, all control of temper being lost on both sides, a violent struggle took place between them, which, melancholy to relate, terminated in the death of Sir Frederick Riversley. What more natural than that his luckless client, horrified at the result, and taking in at one glance the awful position in which he was placed, should, losing

his cooler judgment, yield to humanity's first instinct in time of danger and seek safety in flight? He contended that this was no case of murder, all the evidence tended to show it one of manslaughter, and he trusted that the jury would not be prejudiced against his client for the folly he committed in not at once surrendering himself to justice."

The prisoner's counsel proved successful, insomuch that Mr. Solano saved his neck at the expense of penal servitude for life.

Although the inmates of Clumford Rectory were most unfeignedly shocked at the fate of the luckless baronet, yet it made a most important difference to them. Sir Frederick died intestate, and the consequence was that the Reverend Mortimer not only became Sir Mortimer Riversley, but, as next of kin, succeeded to the whole of the Latimer estates, and Arthur in reality occupied that position in which for twelve months he had dreamed he stood. The Reverend Sir Mortimer was quite the man to punctiliously observe all the conventionalities of the occasion. He put his family into the deepest mourning, had added one hundred pounds to those already offered by Lord Lithfield and the Government for Solano's apprehension, insisted that, under the peculiar circumstances in which Maude had stood to the late baronet, her marriage with Hainton should not take place for a twelvemonth, and then proceeded to confer with his lawyers upon the unexpected inheritance that had fallen to him.

Mr. Prossiter so far belied the traditions of Prossiter, Chudkins & Sons as to actually promise to have Ethel Clothele's marriage settlements ready in something like reasonable time. Lord Lithfield, who has insisted upon being best man to his old friend, warns the lawyer that he will find himself taking a leading part in a dramatic situation not of his own contriving if he does not bustle along this time.

"You see, Prossiter," observed the Viscount, "that, at our time of life, we have no time to lose, and, if you tamper with the impatience of an irascible dragoon like Ralph Leslie, upon my word I should not be surprised if he were to pitch the settlements out of the window and you after them."



"I tell you what, Colonel," said Frank Blanford, the first time he encountered Leslie after learning the news of his engagement, "don't think we are going to let you off that dinner you promised us if your mission was successful. Pray accept my best congratulations, and allow me to remark that if I only succeed about a tenth as well in all my undertakings, I shall call it 'good enough.'"

Ralph Leslie gave a great dinner to his old bachelor friends at the Theatre a couple of days before his marriage. He made Frank Blanford his vice-chairman, who showed great capacity for the situation, insomuch as he not only swallowed an inordinate quantity of claret himself, but induced all those in his vicinity to do likewise.

It was late in the evening, as he was smoking somewhere about his sixth cigar, when that young philosopher was heard to observe in a voice a little thickened with the wine he had imbibed—

"Conventionality be hung, Mrs. Maddingham, and her teaching be shot! Why, there's the Colonel, with Nature up, simply won in a walk."

Frank Blanford was apt to become a little slangy in his cups.

Marion Somers disappeared from Cleveland Lodge before the trial, vanishing for ever from the eyes of her old associates. Down at a small watering-place in Devon lives a lady who, attired always in deep mourning, spends most of her time and her income in the service of the poor. She is known only to the rector of the parish, and shrinks painfully from any overtures that those of her own apparent station may make towards acquaintance.

It is whispered that she once figured as heroine of some tragedy of the law courts; but her retired life precludes much gossip concerning her.

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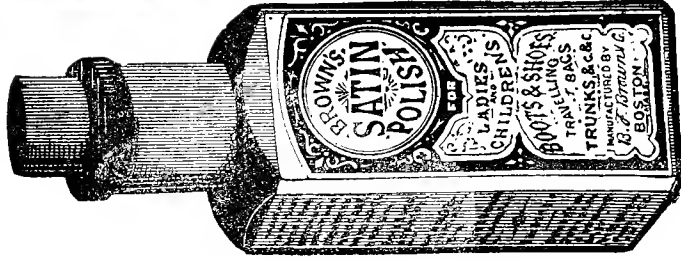
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